THE TEACHING OF POETRY IN THE PRIMARY GRADES, A SUGGESTED SUPPLEMENT TO LANGUAGE ARTS IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF NORTH CAROLINA

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Origin of the Problem

Philosophy today recognizes the need for all possible experiences and activities that may contribute to a continuous, well-rounded development of the individual pupil. Much has been done in this direction in recent years through an increase in the variety of activities. Almost every angle of the curriculum has been affected, but there seems as yet a neglect in some phases of the school program.

Investigations and research in the field of children's literature have brought to light the fact there are many abuses in the teaching of poetry. Children are still being required to memorize, dissect, and study poems, which they have no choice in selecting.

Piper reports:

> The need for a newer and better interpretation of child life has brought to the attention of teachers the many abuses perpetrated in one field in particular--the teaching of poetry.[1] . . .

Seeley notes the mishandling of poetry in the schools. He states in part:

> The first is that poetry has suffered a little more from mishandling in the school than has any other literary type, and further that boys and girls have suffered concurrently.[2]

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1. John Hooper, Poetry in the New Curriculum. Brattleboro, Vermont: Stephen Daye Press, 1932. Foreword: Helen J. Piper.

2. Howard Francis Seely, Enjoying Poetry in School. Richmond: Johnson Publishing Co., 1931. p. X.

From a study of the problem Mrs. Ben Young found that:

> In order to develop appreciation teachers have required children to memorize poetry which could have little or no meaning to them at the time either because it was difficult or too far removed from child interest. They have had children memorize a certain number of poems to meet course of study specifications. They have required memorization of poetry for show, for mind training, and even for punishment. . . . They have dissected poetry to the hurt of its beauty. In short, the schools have bored children with poetry.[3]

Hooper thinks it unfortunate that poetry has been so misused:

> I am speaking from contacts with both children and teachers when I say that it is very unfortunate that so natural a form of human experience can suffer the misunderstanding that poetry does in the elementary school.[4]

That there is a need for readjustment in the teaching of poetry is pointed out by Hooper when he declares:

> . . . The time has come for readjustment in the teaching of poetry. If this subject is to be redeemed from the confusing treatment of the past it must be subjected to the same spirit of investigation that has revamped other school subjects.[5]

According to Piper, modern philosophy recognizes the need for use of all forms of subject matter:

> . . . Modern philosophy maintains that we shall teach children and not subject matter, that subject matter shall be incidental to the great aim of education which is to provide those experiences whereby children live happily, develop desirable character traits and realize and develop their individual abilities. This philosophy also recognizes the need for the use of all forms of subject matter or materials as a means of interpreting life to children.[6]

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3. Mrs. Ben W. Young, "Poems to be used with Units of Work Proposed for Third Grade by the Texas Course of Study." Unpublished Master's thesis, Sam Houston State Teacher's College, Huntsville, Texas. 1939. p. 25.

4. John Hooper, "Poetry Experiences of an Itinerant Teacher." The Elementary English Review, 10:246, December 1933.

5. John Hooper, Poetry in the New Curriculum. Brattleboro, Vermont: Stephen Daye Press, 1932. p. 31.

6. Ibid., Foreword: Helen J. Piper.

If this philosophy is accepted as fundamental, it follows that the teaching of poetry should be given as important a place in the school curriculum as is given to the teaching of spelling and writing. Betzner likewise declares that the teaching of the arts must not be neglected. She asserts:

> The arts in elementary schools have rarely been treated as normal functions of everyday life. Such a sense of luxury and extravagance has hung about music, the graphic arts, and literature that their enjoyment has been regarded as a privilege for the few as an essential preparation for some remote adult appreciation. Moreover, in periods of economic stress, schools are prone to reduce investments in art forms, art materials, and guidance of these appreciations on the ground that more basic matters need attention and support. This emphasizes for children the general attitude that aesthetic experiences are outside the field of fundamental necessities. This usual concept limits children's uses of literature and results in either minimized or exaggerated ideas of its worth. . . . It must be clear that the art of living can be achieved only as each art makes its special contribution as needed and that the service of any one cannot be postponed to some future time lest it be supplanted by another perhaps less adequate but more available.[7]

Mackintosh sees the need of a definite place in the school program for poetry. She declares:

> There must be a definite place in the school program for poetry as a form of literature. This means children's contact with poetry must not be left to chance but that the teacher and children in their planning will definitely include poetry as a form of experience. Books of poems must be accessible and must be attractive in form so that children will want to open the covers and explore the pages. Poetry must not be limited to a few poems scattered in books made up largely of other kinds of material.[8]

For a long time many teachers in North Carolina have felt a need for additional information on the teaching of poetry in the primary

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7. Jean Betzner, Exploring Literature With Children, New York: Bureau of Publications. Teachers College, Columbia University, 1943. p. 13.

8. Helen K. Mackintosh, "Popularizing Poetry in Elementary Schools," School Life, 24:180, March, 1939.

grades. Publication in 1945 of bulletin No. 29--Language Arts in the Public Schools of North Carolina[9]--failed to give the desired information. An examination of the bulletin, for example, will reveal only two references to the teaching of poetry in the primary grades. The fact that there is a great need for a supplement to the Language Arts Bulletin in the field of poetry for primary grades was suggested by Miss Hattie S. Parrott, former associate, Division of Instructional Service, State Department of Public Instruction, Raleigh, North Carolina.[10]

Statement of the Problem

The title of this thesis is The Teaching of Poetry in the Primary Grades, A Suggested Supplement to Language Arts in the Public Schools of North Carolina, Bulletin no. 249. The orderly development of the study requires adequate answers to the following questions.

Sub-problem I

What values can the teaching of poetry contribute?

Sub-problem II

How should poetry be selected in order to attain desirable objectives?

Sub-problem III

By what methods can these objectives best be reached?

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9. _____ Language Arts in the Public Schools of North Carolina. (Bulletin no. 249) issued by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Raleigh, North Carolina, 1945.

10. Hattie S. Parrott, Statement made at Woman's College of the University of North Carolina, Greensboro. June 16, 1948.

Sub-problem IV

What are the activities that may create an interest in poetry?

Delimitations

1. The data for this study is restricted to the primary school-first, second, and third grades.

2. Only the literature of the period 1928-1948 is used because prior to 1928 very little was written on the teaching of poetry. The literature of the period specifically mentioned embodies the best and includes the new.

Method

The study is a survey of the literature to find acceptable methods of teaching poetry in the primary grades that may bring about an enjoyment and appreciation of poetry in pupils.

To clear the problem and find related studies, the following references were used to explore the field:

1. Palfrey, Thomas R. and Coleman, Henry E. Guide to Bibliographies of Theses--United States and Canada, Second edition. Chicago: American Library Association, 1940. 54 pp.

2. United States, Library of Congress. Catalogue Division. A list of American Doctoral Dissertations Printed 1912-1938. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1913-1938.

3. Doctoral Dissertations Accepted by American Universities, 1933-1934--1912-1942. Compiled for the National Research Council and the American Council of Learned Societies by the Association of Research Libraries. New York: The H. W. Wilson Company, 1934-1942.

4. Monroe, Walter Scott. Ten Years of Educational Research, 1918-1927. University of Illinois, Bureau of Educational Research, Bulletin No. 42, August, 1928. Urbana, Illinois: 1928, 377 p.

5. United States Office of Education, Library.
Bibliography of Research Studies in Education, 1926-27--1939-40. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1929-1940.

6. Good, Carter Victor.
Doctors' Theses Under Way in Education, Journal of Educational Research, 1931-1944.

7. Gray, Ruth A.
Doctors' Theses in Education: A List of 797 Theses Deposited With the Office of Education and Available for Loan. Washington: Government Office, 1935. 69 p. (U. S. Office of Education. Pamphlet No. 60).

8. Barstad, Anvor, and others, compilers and editors.
Register of Doctoral Dissertations Accepted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Vol. 1, 1899-1936. Teachers College Bulletin, 28th Series, No. 4, February, 1937. New York; Teachers College, 1937. 136 p.

9. New York University. Washington Square Library.
List of Doctors' and Masters' Theses in Education. New York University, 1890--June 1936. New York: New York University, School of Education, 1937. 117 p.

10. Northwestern University.
List of Doctoral Dissertations, 1896--1934. Evanston, Illinois: The University, 1935.

11. Education Index: A Cumulative Author and Subject Index to a Selected List of Educational Periodicals, Books and Pamphlets. New York: H. W. Wilson Company, 1928-May, 1948.

A survey of the literature revealed many studies which dealt with the teaching of poetry. No study, however, was found which seemed to duplicate the present study--The Teaching of Poetry in the Primary Grades, A Suggested Supplement to Language Arts in the Public Schools of North Carolina.

Related Studies

In 1937, at the George Peabody College for teachers, Amy Frances Howell wrote a master's thesis, entitled Developing a Love and Appreciation of Poetry in Early Grades. The purpose of Howell's study was to

determine, according to research and authoritative opinion, what can be done in the primary grades to develop a love and appreciation of poetry. Her approach to the problem was in this manner:

1. How should poetry for young children be selected?
2. What means should be used to bring young children in contact with good poetry?
3. How may the poetry the child already knows be used in developing a greater love and appreciation for this field of literature?

She reviewed research studies and authoritative opinions regarding children's reading interests and the factors affecting their interests in literature.

From this study, Howell found that literary merit, suitability to children's mental development, their experiences, their social backgrounds, and their interests were important criteria for the selection of children's poetry. Simplicity and directness, rhyme, rhythm, and sound are considered vital factors. She found, too, that some writers emphasized the use of selections that include such factors as freedom for play of the imagination, an appeal to the emotions, and to the sense of humor.

Most frequently mentioned elements of interest were found to be action, humor, child experience, descriptiveness, emotional appeal, and imagination. Favorite themes suggested by the authorities were nature, people, animals, play, and outdoor activity and places.

In her chapter on "General Suggestions for Teaching Poetry," Howell found, according to authoritative opinion, the following techniques valuable in producing love and appreciation of poetry in young children: informal procedures, enough discussion and interpretation to insure

comprehension, freedom to voice children's feelings, repetition of favorites, and recreational memorization.

Procedures for using the following particular methods or techniques were discussed: reading aloud, choral speaking, dramatization, music and poetry, dancing to poetry, and creative writing.

In her implications for further study, Howell stated that, according to her investigations, the problem of developing children's appreciation for poetry is far from being settled and generalizations derived from the opinions of authorities are as yet lacking in scientific backing.

The chief likeness to the present study lies in the general idea--that of developing a love and appreciation of poetry in the primary grades. In compiling authoritative opinions on the problem, only material published during the decade 1927 to 1937 was included by Howell. In the present study all available material having a direct bearing on the problem published between the period 1928 to 1948 was used. The present study gives particular emphasis to one phase of presenting poetry--reading aloud. Howell's study gives equal emphasis to many phases.

At Ohio State University, in 1934, Jennie Bowman wrote a master's thesis entitled The Place of Poetry in the Primary Schools of America, 1830-1930. In the introduction, she gave a brief description of the early Greek and Roman Schools and notes the place given there to poetry. A brief review was given of the philosophies of, and contributions to, education made by Comenius, John Calvin, John Locke, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Herbart, and John Dewey. What school education provided and emphasized in the development of the young child through

the ages and the place given to the values which inhere in poetry was noted. The meager contributions of the earliest writers of children's poetry up to 1830 were reviewed.

The first chapter was devoted to a review of poets and poetry for primary children from 1830 to 1930. In this chapter, Bowman discussed the type of poetry written for children and included samples.

The development of the textbook in the United States from 1830 to 1930 and the influence this had upon the teaching of poetry were discussed in the second chapter. She found religious and didactic poetry used primarily during the period 1830-1865. From 1865 to 1890 didactic, elocutionary, and secular poetry was, for the most part, written and included in textbooks. Bowman concluded that stories and poems once written from the point of view of the adult are now being written from the point of view of the child. She also stated that poems written in the realm of the common-place are probably enjoyed more by the children. The following were listed as writers of the common-place: Dorothy Aldis, Walter de la Mare, A. A. Milne, Rachel Field, and Elizabeth Madox Roberts. Examples of each poet's work was included. A brief review of the early, poorer methods of teaching poetry was included in this chapter. These were given as the probable basis of the children's distaste for poetry.

Methods that are most desirable in teaching poetry on the primary level were discussed in her last chapter. She found these factors desirable in teaching poetry:

1. The teacher must try to build up as broad a background of experience with poetry as possible before she expects children to express their own thoughts in poetic form.

2. The child's experience must be gained through listening to the creative teacher's oral reading.
3. A mood should be established in harmony with the reading that is to take place.
4. The children's thoughts and desires can be made ready for the poem by telling a short story, reading another poem similar in meaning, showing pictures, or by using music.
5. Opportunity should be given for discussion, creative writing, drawing, painting, or modeling in clay.
6. The teacher should not explain the meaning of every poem.
7. Memorization may be secured by repeated reading of poems.

Similarity to the present study was found in the significant place given to the teaching of poetry. The periods selected for study, however, were different. Bowman's study included materials written between the period 1830-1930, while the present study comprises only that literature written during the two decades, 1928-1938 and 1938-1948.

In 1939, at the Sam Houston State Teachers College, Mrs. Ben W. Young wrote a master's thesis, entitled Poems to be Used with Units Proposed for Third Grade by Texas Course of Study. The purpose of this thesis was to furnish the third-grade teachers of Texas with a collection of standard poetry which may be used with the units proposed for third grade by the Texas Course of Study, published at Austin, Texas, in November, 1938. The unit method of teaching was defined. The place of poetry in the curriculum was enhanced. Suggestions for teaching poetry were included. Available research studies in the field of children's interests were examined and anthologists and other literary specialists

were consulted for their judgments on criteria for the selection of suitable poetry. The author's own experience in the teaching of poetry was brought to bear upon the problem, after which, standards for the selection of poetry for children were set up.

Criteria for Selection

1. Does the poem have literary merit?
   a. Rhythm
   b. Imaginative appeal
   c. Pleasing form
   d. Melodious word combination
   e. Human interest
   f. Wholesome emotional appeal.
2. Is it within the child's comprehension, mentally and emotionally?
3. Does it concern the child's immediate interest?
4. Does it possess elements which have interest appeal for the child?
   a. Surprise
   b. Action
   c. Humor
   d. Gaiety
   e. Direct discourse
   f. Repetition
   g. Fancifulness
   h. Familiarity of experience
   i. Directness.

5. Is there sufficient variety as to types of poems presented to the children during the year?

   a. Narrative

   b. Objective

   c. Subjective

   d. Modern

   e. Older

   f. Serious

   g. Nonsense

   h. Rhymed

   i. Unrhymed

Copies of poems selected for each unit of study were included. Those suggested for the third grade were "Poems about Food," "Poems about Shelter," "Poems about Clothing," "Transportation," "Communication," "Living Together," (Citizenship), "Health and Safety," "Play and Recreation," "Natural Resources (Community Beautification)," "Community Background," "Nature," "Number Poems," "Foreign Friends and Other People," "Nonsense Poems."

Young's study is similar to the present one in that the grade level was the same. The emphasis and purpose, however, were different.

In 1940, at Iowa State University, Miss Margaret D. Fleming wrote a thesis, entitled Relative Value of Two Methods of Presenting Poetry to Children. This investigation represents an attempt to compare the relative value of two methods of presenting poetry to children. The first method was that of the study plan. Each day the children were given several poems, not more than four, with study direction for each

poem. The directions included the use of the dictionary for difficult words, encyclopedia references for background information, and questions to be answered from the poems. These poems together with study directions were to be used for silent preparation before coming to class. A formal recitation was conducted during the class period in which the students answered questions. No part of the poem was read to the class by the teacher. In all, fifty poems were selected for the experiment.

For method two, the teacher read all of the poems aloud to the children. In this method the children were not given a copy of the poem beforehand, since the teacher's reading was to be the children's first contact with the material. The reading was followed by informal discussion based upon the questions provided by the experimenter. Directions for approaches to be used preceding the oral reading of each poem and questions for the teacher to use in the class discussion, as well as suggestions for repeated readings of parts of the poems, were given for each poem. The teachers, who carried out the experiment in twelve sixth grade classes, were asked to follow the directions carefully. The relative value of the two methods of presenting poetry to children was determined by comparing the children's opinion of each poem presented. The experiment indicated that the same poems were liked and the same ones disliked when presented by either method.

In her analysis of the experiment, Fleming found that appreciation may be closely related to the reading difficulty of the poetry. This evidence indicated that perhaps poetry which is difficult to read could be appreciated to a larger extent if the teacher reads the poem aloud. She suggested, also, that the teacher's appreciation of the poetry presented may influence the children's appreciation.

There is practically no similarity to the present study. The experiment was a comparison of two methods of presenting poetry, whereas the present study is a survey of the literature to find the best methods of teaching poetry as suggested by authoritative opinion in the field of children's literature and scientific investigations.

CHAPTER II

VALUES OF POETRY

The purpose of this chapter is to set forth the values to be derived from a study of or an acquaintance with poetry. That there are values to be had from such a study is very evident. One may go to this form of literature for many purposes and with satisfying results. Its primary aim is to communicate experiences, but it may be a means of recounting experiences, expressing ideas and feelings, or of solving problems. It is one of the means that man may employ to interpret his own life and thereby interpret the lives of others. Through it, one may be consoled and sustained. One may go to poetry for a better understanding of self and of others, for a keener knowledge of the past and present, and for a clearer comprehension of times and places.[1]

Poetry sometimes creates a world of imagination into which one may escape from a world of reality. It provides a refuge from the dullness, cruelty, drabness, harshness, and poverty of the real world. Bits of doggerel verse at times may bring about the desired relaxation for a tired over-taxed mind and body. At other times it may be used to stimulate the mind and spirit. Poetry may come to one's aid at a time of emotional distress or exaltation, for every mood of man may be touched by this medium.

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1. Howard Frances Seely, Enjoying Poetry in School. Richmond: Johnson Publishing Company, 1931. p. 7.

No other source can bring greater satisfaction to the expression of one's emotions than can lyrical verse. How gratifying it is to look at a beautiful mountain scene and say, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help"; or to behold a magnificent oak and think, "Only God can make a tree"!

One of the great missions of poetry, of course, is to delight. Eastman states:

> . . . But when one who is concerned with conduct and desires to convey a meaning, conveys it poetically, he adds to his speech a great and separate power. He not only gives to our mind the indication, or the general information that he wishes, but he gives to our bodies an acute impression less easy to forget. To read in practical language is to be told, but to read in poetry is to learn by experience. And it is because of this, because imaginative realization can enhance the statement of a meaning and augment its practical effect, that poetry has become identified with meaning, and with truth, and wisdom, and morality, and all those things that look greatly into the future. Poetry but lends itself to them.[2]

Eastman gives further evidence of the value of poetry when he says:

> The poet, the restorer, is the prophet of a greater thing than faith. All creeds and theories serve him, for he goes behind them all, and imparts by a straighter line from his mind to yours the spirit of bounteous living. His wisdom is above knowledge. He cries to our sleeping selves to come aloft, and when we are come he answers with a gesture only. In him we find no principle; we find ourselves reborn alive into the world.[3]

Chilton says:

> I believe that poetry is the highest possible expression of the individual soul in its attempt to live fully, intensely and with integrity in a perplexing world; that ideally it is an effort to phrase mysteries which have never yet been phrased so exactly that our reason may embrace them, and that any effort to do this,

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2. Max Eastman, The Enjoyment of Poetry. New York: Scribner's 1939. pp. 130-131.

3. Ibid., p. 134.

> however inadequate, is closer to real poetry than any facile success with superficial subjects, however clever or momentarily beguiling. . . . A great poem must awaken something in the reader; it must enlighten some aspect of thought, or enrich some moment of living, or immortalize some mood, and bring to each of these a significance lent it by intensity of feeling on the part of the poet. All of which is another way of saying that great poetry is universal in its application, and permanent in its values. . . .[4]

Hubbard makes this statement. "Parents and teachers should anticipate the child's need for good poetry to interpret the experiences of work and play."[5]

Arbuthnot states the value of nonsense verse thus:

> Books of many kinds may be used to meet this need for change, this desire to play imaginatively--the old fairy tales, modern fantasies, mystery tales, stories of real adventures, fine poetry which arrests the attention and stirs the emotions, and humorous stories or verse, even sheer nonsense now and then. These may supply the child with the excitement or the inspiration or the laughter he needs. Our modern world, with its increased social tensions, is in greater need than ever before of the safety value of laughter. Laughter dissolves tensions. The person with a sense of humor is generally a balanced, sagacious person. The literature of humor and even nonsense has a therapeutic value we cannot afford to overlook today. . . .[6]

Betzner gives similar ideas when she says, "There are other needs of children that can be met wholly or in part through enjoyment and participation in literature, such as the necessity for laughter, adventure, attachments, and perspective."[7]

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4. Eleanor Carroll Chilton and Herbert Agar, The Garment of Praise. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1929. pp. 58-59.

5. Alice Hubbard and others, The Golden Flute. New York: The John Day Company, 1932. Foreword. p. VII.

6. May Hill Arbuthnot, Children and Books. New York: Scott, Foresman, 1947. pp. 8-9.

7. Jean E. Betzner, Exploring Literature with Children. New York: Bureau of Publication, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1943. p. 5.

Kangley finds:

> There is a real value in having children familiar with a wide range of poetry and familiar in such a way that the beauty of its phrases is in their minds and the echoes of its music in their ears.[8]

Young says, . . . "poetry enjoyed and comprehended not only conveys meanings, but it develops feelings, broadens sympathies, and deepens the capacity for appreciation."[9] She states further, "poetry makes an important contribution to subject matter fields and to the cultural background of the child."[10]

McGuire thinks:

> . . . The love of poetry is the normal condition of childhood. Children have natural interest in poetry, but that fact alone might not be sufficient reason for giving it a large place in the school curriculum. Poetry has values for the child. It stimulates his imagination, gives emotional release and enriches the life of the bearer by making him more able to discern values clearly.[11]

Bowman found the purpose served in placing poetry in primary grades to be numerous:

1. It gives the child pleasure and satisfaction.
2. It aids in broadening the child's experience.
3. It stimulates in children the desire to create poems of their own.
4. It gives an outlet for the emotional feelings of the child.
5. It satisfies the child rhythmically.

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8. Lucy Kangley. "An Approach to Poetry Appreciation, Elementary English Review, 13:208, October, 1936.

9. Mrs. Ben W. Young, "Poems to be used with Units of Work Proposed for Third Grade by the Texas Course of Study." Unpublished Master's Thesis, Sam Houston State Teachers' College, Huntsville, Texas, 1939, p. 26.

10. Ibid., p. 1.

11. Edna McGuire, "Poem Selection for Primary Grades," The Elementary English Review, 11:263, December, 1934.

6. It sensitizes the child to poetic qualities of expression and language.
7. It provides a common enjoyment for the group.[12]

Piper states:

. . . Many teachers have considered poetry as a separate or detached subject matter, when in reality it is a legitimate channel through which children are led to a more desirable understanding of the richness and beauty of every day life.[13]

Ollie Depew thinks that:

In good poetry we find our thoughts and emotions expressed in a beautiful and moving manner. The poet says for us what we cannot express, or he says it in a more effective manner than we can. Especially must we look to poetry to find satisfactory expression of our emotions. At first sight of a rainbow we want to skip for joy; it will serve the same as a skip to think of Wordsworth's lines: "My heart leaps up when I behold a rainbow in the sky."[14]

Untermeyer says:

. . . And it is often something that may rescue people from all sorts of cares and prisons.
But poetry is first of all a rainbow in the sky--a rainbow glowing with promise for everyone who will look, delighting the eye and uplifting the heart.[15]

Drew gives these values, "that it enlarges and enriches life."[16]

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12. Jennie Bowman, "The Place of Poetry in the Primary Schools of 1830-1930; Unpublished Master's thesis, Ohio State University, Ohio, 1934, p. 113.

13. John Hooper, Poetry in the New Curriculum. Brattleboro, Vermont: Stephen Daye Press, 1932. Foreword: Helen J. Piper.

14. Ollie Depew, Children's Literature. Boston, Ginn and company, 1938. p. 82.

15. Louis Untermeyer, Rainbow in the Sky. New York: Harcourt, 1935. Preface p. xxvii.

16. Elizabeth Drew, The Enjoyment of Literature, New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc. 1935. Preface p. ix.

Roller says that, "It is perhaps the surest way of developing taste."[17]

Groves expresses the following values:

> Poetry is a storehouse of wisdom. Like a chain, it links the noblest thoughts of every age, making immortal all that is best in the world.[18]

Groves states further:

> Poetry will lead the child to many lands of wonder and enchantment from which he will emerge more sensitive to beauty.[19]

The Literature Committee of the Association for Childhood Education bring out the following values:

> . . . The more verse they hold in their minds the more mental and imaginative capital they possess. And the more points of focus they have for actualizing other material-philosophical or scientific material as might be the case. Also the possession of verse with its sound and its pattern would give them a notion of the enchantment and the music that is in language itself.[20]

As Seely says:

> It is the author's conviction that poetry is the most lasting and deeply effective of the literary arts. . . In poetry there is everything that is found in any of the other forms and types of literature, and it is there to a heightened degree. . . . More frequently may the reader find himself, his ideas, and his experiences mirrored in poetry than in other types of literature.[21]

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17. Bert Roller, "Poetry--A Happy Experience in Teaching," Elementary English Review, 5:200, September, 1928.

18. Ruth Groves, "Poetry: Its Place in the School Curriculum," Elementary School Journal, 44:293. January, 1944

19. Ibid., p. 290.

20. Literature Committee of the Association for Childhood Education, Sung Under the Silver Umbrella, New York: Macmillan Co., 1935, Foreword, p. xi.

21. Seely, op. cit., Preface p. vii.

Dalgliesh concludes,

> Poetry should be a part of everyday life, something that we enjoy because it fits in with experience and also makes experience mean more to us.[22]

It is also true, as McNutt points out that: "The poet often catches a view of God which the preacher misses." . . .[23]

Summary

In summarizing this chapter, then, it can be said that the teaching of poetry can contribute many values of real worth, such as the following:

1. It may communicate experience.
2. It may be a means of recounting experiences, expressing ideas and feelings, or of solving problems.
3. It may be a means of interpreting one's life and that of others.
4. It may console and sustain, soothe and satisfy.
5. It may create a world of imagination into which one may escape from a world of reality; thus, it provides a refuge from the dullness, cruelty, drabness, harshness, and poverty of the real world.
6. It may bring about relaxation.
7. It may stimulate the mind and spirit.

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22. Alice Dalgliesh, First Experiences With Literature, Atlanta: Scribner's. 1932. p. 43.

23. Franklin H. McNutt, "A Class Lecture" at Woman's College of the University of North Carolina, April 13, 1942.

8. It may convey meaning.
9. It may restore faith.
10. It may prophesy.
11. It may enlighten thought, enrich life, or immortalize a mood.
12. It may produce laughter.
13. It may develop feelings, broaden sympathies, and deepen the capacity for appreciation.
14. It may contribute to the subject matter fields.
15. It may provide an outlet for emotional feelings.
16. It may satisfy rhythmically.
17. It may rescue from all sorts of cares and prisons.
18. It may delight.

CHAPTER III

METHODS OF TEACHING POETRY

This chapter is concerned with discovering methods of teaching that may bring about pleasure from a study of, or an acquaintance with, poetry.

There are many reasons why children should like this form of literature. First is that they are naturally poetic. They respond readily to rhythm and action. They run, hop, skip, and jump rhythmically. Often-times while skipping, they make up or repeat rhymes to keep time with their movements. They swing and sway as they go merrily along; thus, the lilt and swing of poetry should fit perfectly into their lives. Children revel in color, sound, and pictures. They delight in the sound of words and in the use of color. Their minds are full of imagery. These are the very essence of poetry. To young children the world is always new and full of mystery. Their active imaginations enable them to see beauty and wonder in experiences which are regarded as common-place by others. In poetry the common-place is made fascinating. Children seem to like the elements and factors that go to make up poetry. It follows, then, that children could be taught to like some forms of this medium.

Criterion of Current Practice

Previous studies and investigations in the field of children's interests in reading have indicated almost invariably that children

prefer practically every other type of literature to poetry. Betzner says, "It is not unusual to read or hear that boys and girls do not care for poetry."[1]

Mackintosh reports:

> Recently a study of children's reading interests was made in a large city school system with a sampling of 4300 pupils in grades 2A to 8B. Of this number only 1 boy and 25 girls listed poetry as the kind of reading material they liked best. The author of this study stated: 'In general children show little interest in poetry.' The results of this study would certainly be duplicated if it were conducted not only in other large cities but in almost any community in this country, since previous studies of children's interests have stated similar conclusions.[2]

Frank states that children do not like poetry. She says, "Older children often shy from reading anything that is labeled, 'Verse.' They may read it obediently as 'required reading,' but not for pleasure."[3] Harrington quotes the following statement often heard in teacher assemblies, "But you know, children do not like poetry."[4]

Moore is well-acquainted with the general conception that children do not enjoy poetry. She says, "There is a prevalent notion, sometimes stated as a fact, that children do not like poetry."[5]

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1. Jean Betzner, Exploring Literature with Children in the Elementary School. New York: Bureau of Publication, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1943. p. 54.

2. Helen K. Mackintosh, "Popularizing Poetry in Elementary Schools," School Life, 24:180, March 1939.

3. Josette Frank, What Books for Children? Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc. 1941. p. 32.

4. Mildred P. Harrington, "Children and Poetry," Elementary English Review, 9:57, March, 1932.

5. Annie E. Moore, Literature Old and New for Children. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Houghton, 1934. P. 257.

For a long time boys and girls have gone out from the public schools with the idea that poetry is unattractive and distasteful--a prejudice that they do not try to hide. They have the idea that it is "high brow," "sissy," "abnormal," or "a secret art." Oftentimes they are prejudiced against it before they ever come into actual contact with poetry.

Anderson says:

> It was yesterday's creed that poetry was classic in the most narrow sense of that word, and its quality was based upon the number of moral abstractions which it contained. Children were trained to discern--or to attempt to discern--these abstractions. They spent miserable hours lost in the maze of unfamiliar vocabulary and alien ideas. Children were taught to assimilate poetry; such was the educational intent. No one expected it to be any real use to them.[6]

Untermeyer notes the general conception of poetry by the average American. He states:

> . . . Yet the average man in America believes that poetry is not so much a sacred as a secret art, an abracadabra practiced and enjoyed only by the verbal magicians who are suspiciously expert in the craft. "Poetry is for poets," says the man in the street, with a sneer he does not trouble to disguise. "It has its place, I suppose, but personally," he adds, in cheerful dismissal, "I'm prejudiced" against that sort of thing.[7]

That boys and girls show a distinct dislike for poetry is very evident at every turn. There is no apparent reason for such an attitude

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6. Etoile Anderson, "Poetry for the Second Grade," Elementary English Review, 6:7, January, 1929.

7. Louis Untermeyer, Poetry Its Appreciation and Enjoyment, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1934, p. 3.

since poetry contains so much that is of natural interest to boys and girls. It is an established fact that they enjoy rhyme, rhythm, pictures, action, sound, and color, all of which are elements of poetry. The problem here is to find what has happened to dull poetry for children and to suggest a way to prevent such a catastrophe. The professional literature, research studies, and investigations in the field of children's literature reveal the fact that the traditional treatment of poetry in the public schools is probably responsible for such an attitude.

Wheeler finds that required memorization has been a part of the school program. She says:

> But it is not surprising that so many people dislike poetry when one considers the way in which it is presented in most of our public schools. . . . I have often heard children complaining because they had to memorize poetry for school work, and in nine cases out of ten I have found that the poem in question is more suited to the pages of a sentimental Christmas calendar than to those of a reputable anthology.[8]

Forced memorization for disciplinary purposes is revealed by Ramsey. She finds also the required use of poetic phrases in written composition. She writes:

> Why do so many older people stiffen, inwardly at least, at the mention of the term poem? One strongly suspects that they are among the unhappy thousands who have been forced to memorize one poem per month; who have grimly committed edifying lines as an in school-imposed-after hours form of discipline; who have struggled to insert in "written compositions" the "nice" words which originally appeared in a poem but have been made to glare at them from the blackboard in the form of a list; and perhaps, saddest of all, have struggled to formulate brief and harmless answers to the question "Why do you like it?"[9]

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8. Jean Wheeler, "Poetry for Children," Childhood Education, 6:210, January, 1930.

9. Eloise Ramsey, "The Poetry Hour," Childhood Education, 8:114, November, 1931.

Analysis and interpretation of poetry are given by Harrington as the reason for the dislike of poetry. She says:

> Frequently the explanation lies in the teaching method, especially in an emphasis upon scansion, and subtle interpretation, and analysis, instead of treating poetry as an art which finds its truest expression in beauty of word and sound.[10]

Hollowell thinks the indifference to and dislike for poetry is caused by the selection of poems and the manner of presentation. She writes:

> If a child appears indifferent or expresses a dislike for poetry something has been wrong in the selection. He may dislike a certain poem, but not poetry in general. The selection may not have been in accord with the child's experience and development; or the manner of presentation may have been out of harmony with literary art. . . .[11]

Dalgliesh thinks that poetry is not liked because the schools have made of it an unpleasant task. She says, "Poetry to others is something to be learned in school and thought about as little as possible out of school."[12]

Bernhardt reports that poetry, in the past, was memorized for the "memory gems"--gems which were often too advanced for the learner to understand or appreciate. She states:

> No doubt this feeling of ours dates back to our own education in poetry, which was often of a very conventionalized sort. Our generation memorized poetry for "memory gems" in the elementary

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10. Harrington, op. cit., p. 58.

11. Lillian Hollowell, A Book of Children's Literature. New York: Farrar & Rinehart, Inc., 1939. p. 687.

12. Alice Dalgliesh, First Experiences with Literature. Atlanta: Scribner's, 1932. p. 43.

school, poetry which often was much too advanced for the learner to appreciate, while the poetry of our high school days concerned itself largely with the techniques of scansion and meter.[13]

During his association with the schools, Hooper found these practices prevalent:

> . . . Walking through corridors to the monotonous beat of poems recited in concert, listening to the individual children in "display" recitations of poems that exhibited nothing but the absence of poetry, looking at reams of artificial verses scattered among artificial posters as evidences of an active year of creative work--these were only the beginning. As the months went by it was increasingly evident that there was neither rhyme nor reason to the place that poetry was occupying in the elementary curriculum.[14]

The following practices are noted by Hartman:

> Which brings us to the various reasons we find for placing it in the schools as poetry per se. Here it now runs the hourly risk of no longer being the natural, spontaneous call to beauty, music and imagery, but of becoming so many poems to be studied this half term, so many the next, chosen by some mental scale of testing and grading. Following this measured tendency, rationally the next step would be in the newer books for the study and memorization of poetry to be chosen because they contain the first five hundred words of the Thorndike list. . . .[15]

Groves thinks that the elementary school can prevent this misconception on the part of boys and girls. She says:

> If the elementary school grades do not take the responsibility for the effective teaching of this art, boys and girls in countless numbers will continue to leave the high schools exclaiming "I hate poetry" and one certain instrument for maintaining our culture will have been lost."[16]

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13. Jane M. Bernhardt, "The Beginnings of Poetry," Childhood Education, 10:257, February, 1934.

14. John Hooper, "Poetry Experiences of an Itinerant Teacher," Elementary English Review, 10:246, December, 1933.

15. Juliet Hartman, "Place of Poetry in Children's Literature," Elementary English Review, 9:18, January, 1932.

16. Ruth Groves, "Poetry: Its Place in the School Curriculum," Elementary School Journal, 44:292, January, 1944.

The manner of presentation is suggested by Arbuthnot as the reason for the general dislike:

> Here, then, are some clues to the rather general prejudice against poetry: it is hard to understand; it is hard to read; it is often too long; it has not always been well presented.[17]

McKee, on the other hand, thinks that the use of poetry as a source of information has been responsible for the prevalent distaste:

> . . . There is reason to believe that approaching literature as information to be remembered has done its share of creating distaste for good prose and poetry.[18]

According to Lowe, "It is difficult to scourage the diagrammers and moral-hunters out of the temple of children's poetry."[19]

Weekes says,

> Such indifference to, and such an unfavorable attitude toward, poetry as is implied above, despite its strong emotional appeal, its beauty of language and its beauty of thought, are traceable not only to the choice of poetry to be read in the classroom, but to the goals set and the procedures followed, which is to say, the teacher's aim and method. . . .[20]

Criteria for Selecting Poetry for Children

The effective teaching of poetry naturally presents two major problems, that of selection and that of techniques for its presentation. It is only in recent times that a notable change has taken

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17. May Hill Arbuthnot, Children and Books. Chicago: Scott, Foresman, 1947. p. 161.

18. Paul McKee, Reading and Literature in the Elementary School. New York: Houghton, 1934. p. 517.

19. Orton Lowe, "What to Emphasize in the New Poetry for a More Popular Appeal to Children," Elementary English Review, 6:38, February, 1929.

20. Blanche E. Weekes, Literature and the Child. New York: Silver, Burdett, 1935. P. 280-281.

place in the choice of poetry considered suitable for children. Not many years ago, only verse of high sentiment qualities, moralistic traits, and elocutionary characteristics was thought desirable for children.

The idea that literature should contribute to the moral growth of the child resulted in the selection of much material that pointed to a moral. Poems about children or childhood were regarded as children's poetry.[21] In many cases, such poems reflected the poet's childhood from an adult point of view; thus reflective and philosophical poetry entered into the realm of children's poetry.

Another fallacy in selection grew out of the assumption that good literature for children of one generation must be good literature for children of another. The fact that children's experiences and interests change from generation to generation was not taken into account.

The tendency, too, has been to select material which has passed the test of time. Such a practice resulted in the use of the old and disregard for all that is new.

Review of Current Practice

In many instances, adult standards of enjoyment were used as a basis for selecting poetry for children. Betzner cautions against a program of all adult selections.

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21. Blanche E. Weekes, Literature and the Child. New York: Silver, Burdett, 1935. p. 2.

> Within the inevitable limits of a world in which adult selections predominate, children's choices must be safeguarded and assumptions concerning what is good for them must be carefully examined.[22]

McKee reports that formerly selections were made on the following basis:

> For some time there has existed the rather common notion that the fundamental purpose in teaching literature is to give children an appreciation of good prose and poetry. Usually this has referred to an understanding of and perhaps a liking for such matters as excellent style, construction imagery, the development of plot, and the choice of vocabulary. Consequently teachers confronted with the need of discovering what literature to teach have chosen carefully those literary selections which contained splendid examples of items to be appreciated.[23]

According to Mackintosh, former standards of selecting poems for children are, in part, responsible for the obvious dislike for poetry.

> . . .Children's apparent lack of liking for poetry must be explained through the kind of poetry experience which they have had. In the first place, children may have had little exposure to poetry other than the samples they have had within the school readers, or the kind of poetry which has been used with children may have been selected entirely on the basis of the teacher's own interest and may have had little appeal for children.[24]

Criteria for Selecting Poetry in Order to Attain Desirable Results

In attempting to select poetry for children, standards or criteria of some description seem necessary, although at no time

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22. Betzner, op. cit., p. 7.

23. Paul McKee, Reading and Literature in the Elementary School. New York: Houghton, 1934. p. 474.

24. Mackintosh, op. cit., p. 180.

should such standards serve as an inflexible measurement. Experiments, studies, and investigations in the field of children's interests have brought about a better understanding of children--their likes, dislikes, and experiences. For this reason, the findings afford guidance in the selection of poetry for children.

Dalgliesh asserts:

> One of the great changes that have taken place with regard to literature for children is the change in the attitude of adults. There is a growing realization of the importance of first experiences with literature and a willingness to spend more time on the selection of books. This change has come with our realization of the importance of the early years of childhood and our interest in child psychology. We no longer select "a book for a child of four," "a book for a child of seven," but we take into consideration the intelligence, interests and experience of the child for whom we are choosing the book.[25]

The following criteria are suggested by McKee:

> The matter of determining the poems and prose selections to be presented to children in the elementary school is of vital importance. One must make certain, first of all, that such material is excellent literature. There is no place for the cheap, sentimental, or shoddy poem or story. In addition, there must be assurance that the material is suitable for children. This means that it must appeal to their immediate interests and lie within their experiences and comprehension.[26]

Rawlinson thinks:

> Literature for children is not a specific kind of literature, any more than food for children is a specific kind of food. . . .So, too, any literature that children can psychologically comprehend and can mentally and emotionally thrive on is literature for children.[27]

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25. Dalgliesh, op. cit., pp. 7-8.

26. Paul McKee, Reading and Literature in the Elementary School. New York: Houghton, 1934. pp. 483-484.

27. Eleanor Rawlinson, Introduction to Literature for Children. New York: Norton, 1937. p. 3.

Huber states a similar idea. She says:

> There is really no specialized body of literature to be known as children's literature. All the world of literature is open to children and to those who work with children; from it they may take those books (or parts of books) that satisfy the needs and interests of children at varying levels of development and growth.[28]

Huber continues:

> This does not mean that adult selections or adult standards shall govern the choice of books for children. Far from it, emotional and social maturity (or immaturity) of children has its own demands, and those demands must be recognized if children are to cultivate a love for literature that will bring them satisfactions as children and persist as satisfactions throughout their entire lives.[29]

Eaton, too, thinks that children should be allowed to choose for themselves. She says:

> . . .Its appeal can never be regimented but must remain forever, as it always has been, a matter into which individual choice and individual feelings enter. It must come at least to the finding by each reader of a poem that because of its thought and form speaks clear and straight to him, and so becomes his personal possession.
>
> This in itself lays a grave responsibility upon poetry-loving adults. For poetry must, in some fashion or other, be put in the way of boys and girls, both the readers and non-readers, so that each one may have the opportunity to find the poem that belongs to him.[30]

Betzner thinks that children should have a part in the selection:

> It is doubtful that literature can make its greatest contribution to either children or adults if their major efforts are devoted to accepting materials selected by others than themselves.

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28. Marion Blanton Huber, Story and Verse for Children. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1940, p. 3.

29. Ibid., p. 3.

30. Ann Thaxter Eaton, Reading With Children. New York: The Viking Press, 1945. p. 132.

> Its greatest service to personal experience is found in the business of sifting the important from the less important.[31]

As the result of her experiment, Influence of Meaning on Children's Choices of Poetry, Weekes points to following factors as being important in selecting children's poems.

> A recognition of the fact that neither the amount nor the type of poetry should be limited in the intermediate grades because reading skill is not necessarily an established fact in such grades; that there should be wide reading of poetry, but of poetry which embodies experiences more in harmony with the child's probable experiences and which, at the same time, is expressed in language within his comprehension.[32]

Richardson, in her study of Christina Rossetti's poetry, brought out the following elements that may be important in judging other poems:

> She thought of the child as a child and presented to him poems well within his understanding and experience. She led him to feel rather than to see. By doing so he was unconscious of "being taught" or of "learning".[33]
>
> . . . As the reader had opportunity to observe, the poems are sincere, simple, tender, picturesque, and musical. They truly deal with childish themes in an artistic manner.[34]

The following characteristics are suggested by Johnson and Scott as being important in selecting poetry for children.

> In order to bring these joys to the child, the selections, chosen according to his ability and interests, must fit his comprehension. For the young child rhythm is especially attractive, whereas assonance is as acceptable as rhyme. Action is important, for the waking hours of a child are crowded with

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31. Betzner, op. cit., p. 1.

32. Blanche E. Weekes, Influence of Meaning on Children's Choices of Poetry. New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1929. p. 42.

33. Sarah E. Richardson, "Christina Rossetti as a Writer of Poetry for Children." Unpublished Master's thesis. Duke University, Durham, N. C., 1942. p. 106.

34. Ibid., p. 110.

activity. It is well to have at least the hint of a story, the characters which are familiar to child life--toys, pets, and children. . . . As children grow older the rhythm and action may be less marked, and poems with word pictures which now may appeal, in turn will lead to those of greater difficulty. Mental ability and interests, however, must still be considered. . . .

No matter for what age of child a poem is supposed to be, it must ring true; it must have the tone of sincerity. For this reason, sentimental and generally speaking, moralizing poems are to be avoided.[35]

Certain elements have particular interest for children. The following are pointed out by Kangley:

In a discussion of this length it is impossible to suggest except in a general way a basis for the selection of material. The age of the group, its emotional maturity, its social background, are all governing conditions. . . . We know that children respond to definite rhythms. Other things being equal, the poem that sings itself captures their fancy. In similar fashion they prefer simply told incident and clear-cut characterization. They have little interest in nature as such, but have a lively interest in people and in animals. Humor, to appeal to them, must be of the hilarious and fairly obvious sort. The ironical, satirical, and whimsical are more likely to puzzle than to amuse them. The abstract, the philosophical, and the didactic have no appeal for the young. . . .[36]

Wheeler lists elements of poetry that appeal to children. She says:

Simplicity is a factor that appeals to little children almost as much as do strongly marked rhythms. They are not organically fitted to hear complicated units. Refrains and all sorts of repetition give them the thrill of recognition and keep them from getting lost. However, they don't demand simplicity if a poem is sufficiently musical to please them by its sound alone. But if they are not held by that and want to understand what is meant, then the simpler the better. But this is no reason they should be given trivial verse. Some of our very best poetry is of the most simplicity.[37]

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35. Edna Johnson and Carrie E. Scott, Antology of Children's Literature. Boston: Houghton, 1940. p. 747.

36. Lucy Kangley, "An Approach to Poetry Appreciation," Elementary English Review, 13:206, October, 1936.

37. Wheeler, op. cit., p. 212.

> Another preference of children in this youngest group seems to be for the familiar rather than the unfamiliar in subject matter. . . . The common every-day world about them has not yet lost its novelty to the little ones. . . .[38]

According to Curry and Clippenger the music should be very prominent and the idea absent or not prominent. They encourage the use of strongly emphasized rhythm.[39]

Frank suggests that children will listen to poems selected with a view of challenging their interests and not merely charming their senses. She suggests also that the selection be based on a wide range, since there is such a wide range in children's tastes. She thinks that poems of action and poems which tell a story have the greatest appeal for children.[40]

Arbuthnot points out certain qualities that charm children; they are variety, musical quality, action, story interest, humor, and illustrations.[41]

The following means of judging the suitability of new poems are suggested by Arbuthnot:

> When we choose a new poem for children we may well test it by asking ourselves these questions: First, does it sing--with good rhythm, true unforced rhymes, and a happy compatibility of sound and subject--whether it is nonsense verse or narrative or lyric poetry? Second, is the diction distinguished--with words that are rich in sensory and associative meanings, words that are unhackneyed, precise, and memorable? Third, does the subject

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38. Ibid., p. 213.

39. Charles Curry and Erle Clippinger, Children's Literature. New York: Rand McNally and Company, 1930. p. 370.

40. Frank, op. cit., pp. 32-33.

41. Arbuthnot, op. cit., p. 37.

matter of the poem invest the strange or the everyday experiences of life with new importance and richer meaning? When a poem does these three things, it is indeed good poetry. . . .[42]

Walraven advises that:

There has been some unevenness in the quality of the selections. Some critics have said that those who select books overstress the literary merit instead of considering the child appeal.[43]

Barnes thinks that poetic merit and children's interest the most important criteria in selecting poetry for children. He points out other qualities as being important--import, impact, distinguished diction, rhythm which follows the spirit feeling, and shifting shades of emphasis of the poem, and gay and bright lyrics. He believes, too, that great poetry for children must deal greatly with children's experiences. This principle, he thinks, enables the elimination of poetry about children and childhood written from the retrospective view-point of adults. It eliminates also the use of poetry which represents children whimsically, archly, or naively.[44]

Barnes suggests the following elements as being important:

The substance of a good poem is the realistic sensory material of life: facts, experiences, actions, sights, smells, sounds, scenes, people, and other animals, and such like. Excellent poetry goes somewhere and means something.[45]

He concludes:

. . . Much poetry made for children and liked by them will be below this lofty level, and doubtless it should be. Certainly

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42. Ibid., p. 160-161.

43. Margaret K. Walraven, Teaching Through the Elementary School Library. New York: The H. W. Wilson Company, 1948. p. 37.

44. Walter Barnes, Contemporary Poetry for Children. Detroit: C. C. Certain, Publisher, 1936. pp. 1-5.

45. Ibid., p. 2.

> a deal of nonsense and humorous verse, some of it most delightful, is of a lower, or at least a different order, with qualities and values of its own; and certainly the childs' poetical education should include a goodly share of hearty merriment. Let us run the gamut of all children's experiences and moods, and enrich childhood with all the varying pleasures and delights which poetry can induce. But even of jingles and rhymes there are varying gradations of merit; and it is perhaps as important to distinguish between bad and good verse as between bad poetry and good, to recognize at a glance the inane, archly playful, and anxiously sincere doggerel.[46]

Standards of Good Methods

In recent years a great many changes have taken place in methods of teaching in the public schools. This change attended a revision in objectives and materials used in all the school subjects. With the change in the methods of teaching in major subject matter fields comes the need for a change in methods of teaching in the field of poetry. In the past, poetry was used to teach a moral lesson, give an opportunity for reciting, meet the course of study requirements, and provide "memory gems." Poetry was even used for disciplinary purposes.

Inferior methods of teaching and undesirable objectives have not brought about the desired outcomes--that children have come to enjoy and appreciate poetry. Purposes and outcomes that more nearly approximate the educational philosophy of today are expressed by Paul McKee when he says:

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46. Ibid., p. 5.

> The matter of teaching literature is a distinctly different job. Here the purposes of teaching are not at all concerned with skills. They deal almost entirely with the development of desirable tastes and interests in reading good things. The attitude of both the teacher and pupil should be purely a recreatory attitude. Only so-called appreciation methods and literary materials are appropriate.[47]

McKee says further:

> . . .Thus the important difference between the teaching of the fundamentals of reading and the teaching of children's literature is much the same as that which should exist between the teaching of the fundamentals of arithmetic and the development of the enjoyment of music.[48]

Formal textbook type of procedures, then, are not acceptable for the poetry hour; instead procedures that tend toward informality are preferable.

> . . .To proceed informally does not rule out guidance; to do so would result in little, if any, training. It does infer that the time devoted to the reading of poetry is a recreatory period, a time of free, frank, personal, and informal talk over what is being read, with no thought of "dissection," nothing to indicate that the hour has arrived in the routinized day for the "literature lesson," nothing to indicate that a test on the subject, and grades for the test, lie just ahead, or that the intangible--growth in appreciation--will, in time, be measured by a mysterious yardstick.[49]

Roller thinks that the poetry period should be an explorative experience. He writes:

> There should be a poetry period for each class in the elementary school. It must not, however, be conducted with the usual class room procedure, the holding up of hands, the

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47. Paul McKee, Reading and Literature in the Elementary School. Boston: Houghton, 1934. p. 473.

48. Paul McKee, The Teaching of Reading. Boston: Houghton, 1948. p. 554.

49. Blanche E. Weekes, Literature and the Child, New York: Silver, Burdett, 1935. p. 281.

> questions and answers, and the assignment. Instead, it should be a gathering of people who are to read and discuss poetry, perhaps also to write it. It should be purely an explorative experience with no thoughts of tests or examinations. . . .[50]

Lowe says, "There is really no such thing as teaching poetry."[51] Of method, he thinks that no more is necessary than to bring the child and the book of verse together under pleasant reading conditions and let time and his own experience do the rest.[52]

He continues:

> If the child comes to realize himself in poetry, he must, like Bambi, go off alone into the woods. A teacher should be little more than a warden to see that no intruder breaks into the solitude where the child is eating his Peacock Pie, now that he is six.[53]

Ramsey questions the place to begin. She thinks the surest way is to keep on familiar ground. Better results can be expected if the poetry hour is made a time for wonder and contemplation. She says:

> If listening to good poetry is a part of daily experience, if the teacher is discerning in choosing the right moment for new impressions, a lasting love of poetry is established. Children to whom the sound of poetry is familiar welcome with zest encounters with it on the printed page. The store of remembered rhythms in one's mind helps tremendously in the more complex process of getting one's poetry directly from the printed page.[54]

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50. Bert Roller, "Poetry--A Happy Experience in Teaching," Elementary English Review, 5:199, September, 1928.

51. Lowe, Op. Cit., p. 38.

52. Ibid., p. 38.

53. Ibid.,

54. Ramsey, Op. Cit., p. 116.

According to Kangley "Our problem is to discover and utilize techniques that will help children to respond to the rhythms of poetry and to make them sensitive to its emotional appeal and its imagery."[55]

Of techniques Kangley says:

> Their usefulness must depend upon the individual poem and the individual situation. Too often an extremely helpful technique is discredited because it is used for the wrong material. No technique can be a blanket prescription but must be used with tact and discrimination.[56]

Betzner and Moore warn against the application of minor details of any method:

> All who come into intimate relation with considerable number of teachers are aware of the of anxiety that exists among them regarding the mastery of every detail of some prescribed method of teaching reading. If they are not actually afraid to depart from it or relax its exacting application, they too frequently lack the equipment necessary to enlarge and enrich the reading experiences of their pupils.[57]

Seeley says, "No matter how sound and useful a pattern may be, individual use demands individual adaptation."[58]

Method has long been a perplexing problem to teachers. An answer is continually being sought to the question often asked, "What

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55. Kangley, op. cit., p. 207.

56. Ibid., p. 240.

57. Jean Betzner and Annie E. Moore, Every Child and Books. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merril Company, 1940. Introduction, p. VI.

58. Seeley, op. cit., p. 79.

is the one best way?" Weekes thinks that there is no single best method to follow;[59] a method that will fit one situation may not fit another. A method that will please one teacher may displease another. A method that may bring one child joy may not even touch another.

Method involves many things. In selecting a method the total situation will need to be taken into consideration--the children, their experiences and their interests. The teacher, too, will exert tremendous influence upon the method.

Weekes believes that a method tends to be good or poor in terms of attitudes developed.[60] The traditional methods of teaching poetry have not brought about desirable attitudes; instead they have brought about an indifference to, and a dislike for, poetry. There seems to be, then, a need of knowing how one may test a method.

Weekes asserts:

> . . .One test, then, of good method may be made in terms, not only of the attaining of the primary or specific goal, but in terms of the desirable nature of the concomitants that accrue to the learner during the process of learning.
> Good method is also distinguished by the three factors: readiness, activity, and satisfaction or pleasure. . . .[61]

Readiness is described by Weekes as being a mental set to action or a mental set against action--a predisposition one way or another. To be ready for an experience with poetry, the child will

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59. Blenche E. Weekes, Literature and the Child. New York: Silver, Burdett, 1935. p. 256.

60. Ibid., p. 257.

61. Ibid., p. 257.

need to be in a state of curiosity or anticipation for what he is about to hear.[62]

Activity suggests many things. In a teaching situation it implies that the child in some way be active. Since the primary appeal of poetry is to the emotions, an experience with poetry would necessitate, to some degree, that the whole being be active. To some extent, the child should experience the incidents or the thought of the poem selection.[63] It should make him feel, enjoy, and live through the episodes, the feelings, and the descriptions of the poem. In order to feel, enjoy, and live through the events, the child will need to bring into the picture his own similar experiences.

> By bringing his own vital experiences to bear upon the reading, whether listening or actually reading himself, the child is mentally active. Because he is by nature both mentally and physically active, to satisfy the impulse to activity tends to be pleasurable. . . . .[64]

How does the child feel toward an experience with poetry? Attitudes or reactions tending to result from such an experience will either be desirable or undesirable; that is, the child will have a feeling of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The more satisfying the poetry experience, the greater is the possibility that there will be the desire to repeat it, or the desire for a comparable experience;

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62. Blanche E. Weekes, Literature and the Child. New York: Silver, Burdett and Company, 1935. p. 258.

63. Paul McKee, Reading and Literature in the Elementary School. Boston: Houghton, 1934. p. 475.

64. Blanche E. Weekes, Literature and the Child. New York: Silver, Burdett and Company, 1935. p. 267.

the less satisfying the poetry experience, the less likely will be the desire to repeat such an experience.

The Teacher's Relation to Effective Poetry Presentation

Effective poetry presentation will be influenced greatly by the teacher; therefore pleasure and appreciation to be derived from any method of presenting poetry will be conditioned by her. The teacher's interest in, and knowledge of, children't literature, her philosophy of education, her knowledge of child psychology, and her background of experience are all factors which will influence the method followed.

Many authorities in the field of children's literature think the teacher's appreciation the most important factor in her presentation; some think it impossible to present effectively anything that one is not interested in; others believe the teacher's attitude can be detected by the pupils and can, consequently, determine a favorable or unfavorable reception. There are some who believe that sensitiveness to the nature of children is the most necessary trait for those who guide the poetry program.

Young points out:

> First of all, the teacher must be interested and enthusiastic. She cannot lead a child to love poetry by saying to him half-heartedly, "This is a beautiful poem, I know you will enjoy it," or by pointing it out to him with useless identifying remarks, like the weary guide in the memorial museum.[65]

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65. Mrs. Ben W. Young, "Poems to be Used with Units of Work Proposed for Third Grade by the Texas Course of Study," Unpublished Master's thesis, Sam Houston State Teacher's College, Huntsville, Texas. 1939. p. 25.

Curry and Clippinger counsel, "Remember that in poetry, more than elsewhere one can present only what one is really interested in and, as a consequence, enthusiastic about."[66]

Groves thinks that the teacher's appreciation will influence effective poetry presentation.

> The extent of the child's response to poetry will depend on the teacher's appreciation of the art. First of all, the teacher must realize the significance of the subject. A teacher who has no appreciation for the art of poetry cannot teach poetry successfully. . . .[67]
>
> . . . . . .
>
> If the teacher regards poetry as significant, he or she will probably make it significant to the pupils. . . .[68]

Harrington asserts, "Like story telling, only the poems which one is really interested in, and enthusiastic about, should be presented. . . ."[69]

According to Huber enthusiasm communicates itself to children. She says:

> . . .Love and enthusiasm for good books shared with children, communicates itself to them. That is, a sincere and genuine love does. Children are quick to recognize superficiality and insincerity in praise of books, and in such a situation, up goes barriers of defense. If children suspect that an adult has an ulterior motive in the recommendation of a book, the book is immediately condemned. . . . On the other hand, true love of books and enjoyment of them can be shared, and children are quick to respond and participate in a cooperative venture that gives them so much pleasure.[70]

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66. Curry and Clippinger, op. cit., p. 369.

67. Groves, op. cit., p. 293.

68. Ibid., p. 293.

69. Harrington, op. cit., p. 58.

70. Huber, op. cit., p. 4.

Drew, too, thinks that delight in books is communicated to children.

> . . . The facts of literary history can be taught, but the only way in which the love of literature can be taught is by arousing the desire to read literature, and all the teacher can do towards that end is to describe and analyze his own enjoyment, to try to communicate his own sources of human and intellectual and artistic delight in books.[71]

Mackintosh believes that it is necessary for the teacher to have a genuine liking for poetry in order to make an appeal to children.

> . . .Literature in general, and poetry in particular, represent a field of experience which the teacher needs to approach in the spirit of adventure. The teacher herself must have a genuine liking for poetry or she will be unsuccessful in making it appeal to children.[72]

Johnson and Scott point out, "The first requirement is that the teacher or parent should consult her own taste; otherwise her indifference will create a similar feeling in the young listener. . . ."[73]

More than appreciation of literature is necessary for the teacher who will lead children to find pleasure and permanent interest in poetry. Weekes asserts:

> The teacher must be thoroughly familiar with the literature for children, and keep in touch with contemporary production.

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71. Elizabeth A. Drew, The Enjoyment of Literature. New York: Norton, 1935. p. IX.

72. Mackintosh, op. cit., p. 180.

73. Johnson and Scott, op. cit., p. 748.

She must know how to select the wheat from the chaff. To give guidance that will be a training in literature demands, then, that she who guides must be discriminating, with an ability to recognize literary merit. She needs to be equipped with something more than a list of poetry and prose, or teaching techniques even of high order. She needs more than a knowledge of the literature for children which is within their possible interest and experiences. The primary requisite in teaching is sympathetic understanding of children and childhood.[74]

Further qualities of a good teacher are suggested by Huber.

> . . . The teacher, the librarian, the mother, or the father who aspires to be the agent through whom children come to know and love literature must, first and foremost, have an understanding of children--their needs, desires, thoughts, interests and daily lives. Then the teacher or parent may stand ready to offer a book, a story, a poem at the particular time that it will find an audience. He or she will know well the effect of timeliness and will allow for the fact that groups and individuals vary in their interests. Requirement and compulsion and competition will not be part of her program. She will know the degrees of understanding of which a group or a child is capable; she will know that ability to understand is the result of intelligence, of experience, and of environment. . . .[75]

Weekes adds:

> . . .To those teaching at the lower levels of the school, the most helpful suggestion that can be offered is to be natural; to encourage children to be natural and spontaneous; to develop and maintain a normal, natural, happy classroom atmosphere; to take pleasure one's self in poetry and in the reading and the saying of poetry to children, to know much poetry for children and to let the reading and saying of poetry become a daily habit.[76]

These qualifications seem to place the teaching of poetry beyond the abilities of many teachers, but Hooper declares:

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74. Blanche E. Weekes, Literature and the Child. New York: Silver, Burdett, 1935. p. 276.

75. Huber, op. cit., p. 3-4.

76. Blanche E. Weekes, Literature and the Child. New York: Silver, Burdett, 1935. p. 283.

> The accomplishment of these new aims for poetry places no more demands on a teacher's artistic ability than those that arithmetic puts on her skill in mathematics. In both cases she must be sensible and sensitive to the possibilities of the subject.[77]

Hooper says further:

> . . .The teacher must come close enough to her children to gain their confidence. It is also necessary for her to have some conception of their composite and individual attitudes towards poetry. . . .[78]

Oral Reading

Primarily, the appeal of poetry is to the ear. It is a language to be heard rather than read. Seldom is the sound or music of poetry realized until is is read aloud. For that reason much poetry should be read to children.

Oral reading is the oldest and probably the most desirable method of presenting poetry to children. If well done, it can be the most effective means of giving children pleasurable experiences through poetry. It is a belief that oral reading offers more and greater opportunities for reliving or re-experiencing poetry than any other type of presentation.

Many authorities in the field of children's literature reveal the fact that stilted and formalized presentations have done great injury to the poetry program and may, in part, be responsible for the low esteem given poetry by children.

Arbuthnot points out:

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77. John Hooper, Poetry in the New Curriculum, Brattleboro, Vermont: Stephen Daye Press, 1932. p. 33.

78. Ibid., p. 49.

> . . .One man suggests that it often sounds silly because of the way it is read. He maintains that when women read poetry, they invariably take on a "holy tone" that is enough to drive able-bodied boys to strong language and a permanent distaste for poetry.[79]

Oral reading, of the best order, should make the listener forget the reader, the words, and the surroundings; it should make one see the pictures, hear the sounds, and smell the odors described in the reading.

Mackintosh thinks that the child's first experience with a poem should be that of hearing it read orally.[80] ". . .for remembering that the appeal of poetry is primarily to the ear not to the eye--one should read much of it aloud to children."[81]

According to Hill, enjoyment of poetry reaches its fullest when it is heard and shared with others.[82]

Chilton and Agar point out:

> Poetry is an art whose medium is spoken language, language used in such a fashion that the sound is of very great importance as well as the sense. Properly speaking, poetry does not exist until it is read aloud, any more than music exists until it is played.[83]

Parrish contends that oral reading is best way of teaching appreciation of poetry. He writes:

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79. Arbuthnot, op. cit., p. 161.

80. Mackintosh, op. cit., p. 183.

81. Johnson & Scott, op. cit., p. 748.

82. Marjorie Hill, "One Teacher's Experience in Arousing Interest in Poetry," Elementary English Review, 17:192, May, 1940.

83. Eleanor Chilton and Herbert Agar. The Garment of Praise; the Necessity for Poetry. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1929. p. 8.

> But perhaps the chief value of oral reading is that it is the best, if not the only, method of teaching appreciation of poetry. . . . A part of the very essence of poetry is its sound. To be appreciated it must be spoken "with the living voice," not merely read silently from cold type. . . . Appreciation is a "spiritual" matter, if I may use so old-fashioned a word. Its presence or absence is almost infallibly revealed by reading aloud.[84]

Curry and Clippinger think poetry should be presented orally. "The appeal is first to the ear just as in music. The teacher should read or better recite the poem in order to get the best results."[85]

That poetry appreciation may begin with oral reading is suggested by Ramsey.

> . . .As has been said, the first step toward the appreciation of poetry comes through hearing it until one's ears catch the music of verse and the listener begins to feel something of the inner sense of word pictures.[86]

Frank says that children will listen with delight to poetry that is read to them. She thinks that a taste for poetry can be cultivated by reading aloud.[87] Of her childhood experience Wheeler says, "We were very fortunate as children to hear poetry read out aloud every day of our lives at the family breakfast table."[88]

Gray says, "Start enjoyment of poetry by letting students

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84. Wayland Maxfield Parrish, Reading Aloud. New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1943. p. 25.

85. Curry and Clippinger, op. cit., p. 369.

86. Ramsey, op. cit., p. 116.

87. Frank, op. cit., p. 32.

88. Wheeler, op. cit., p. 217.

hear poetry well read, . . .it must be read aloud for the beauty of the sound."[89]

Oral reading is given a significant place by McKee. He asserts:

> A considerable share of classroom work in literature should involve oral reading of good prose and poetry by the teacher. This is particularly true in the primary grades. In the kindergarten such procedure represents the chief means of acquainting children with good stories and poems. It is probable, too, that more of this reading should be carried out in the intermediate grades than has been the custom. Certainly one of the most important qualifications of a teacher of literature is the ability to read well aloud to children.[90]

Arbuthnot thinks the child's first experience with poetry should be that of hearing it read aloud.

> The very young child who enjoys poetry naturally does so because he has not yet been pestered with the mechanical difficulties of reading it for himself, but has met poetry as it was originally intended that everyone should meet it--through the ears rather than through the eyes. . . . So adults should begin poetry with the small child, saying it to him, reading it to him, encouraging him to join in and say it, too.[91]

Qualities of Good Oral Reading

The quality of oral reading influences greatly the child's reception of poetry. In many cases, the child may reject or accept

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89. William S. Gray, Reading in Relation to Experience and Language, Supplementary Educational Monographs Published in Conjunction with the School Review and the Elementary School Journal Proceedings of the Conference on Reading Held at the University of Chicago, Volume VI, Number 58, December, 1944. The University of Chicago. Chicago, Illinois. p. 151.

90. McKee, op. cit., p. 528.

91. Arbuthnot, op. cit., pp. 165-166.

a poem from the way in which it is read. It is the teacher's problem, then, to discover how she may improve her manner of oral reading.

Arbuthnot believes one should start with the reading the lively ditties of Mother Goose. This will enliven the reading and give one a sense of tempo and variety. Gradual progress may be made by reading poetry of increasing difficulty. She suggests next the subtle lyrics of Blake, Rossetti, or De la Mare. Here she thinks something more than vigor and swing will be required, that is, imagination and a delicate precision of interpretation. All practice should be done orally, exercising every effort to get the general mood or feeling of the poems.[92]

Arbuthnot continues:

> To improve further both your taste in what constitutes good poetry and also your ability to read well, do not confine yourself to juvenile selections, but explore adult poetry also.[93]
> . . . . . .
> . . .For those who have cultivated a listening ear, poetry has the same therapeutic quality as music. When you have made this discovery, you will be ready to use poetry with children as it should be used--for their refreshment, for merriment, for stimulation, for quiet reassurance.[94]

In reading poetry to children, the Literature Committee of the Association for Childhood Education advises keeping within

92. Arbuthnot, op. cit., p. 167.

93. Ibid., p. 167.

94. Ibid., p. 188.

the mood of the poem.

> The music that conveys the rise of the morning, the pause of the evening, the presence of the night, is as different as any music that can be given in words. The essential music that is in each should be revealed by one who appreciates it. The child who takes one or the three of these poems into his or her mind should feel that music. And the problem is to get the children to feel it. A simple but intelligent reading could help them. But the sing-song, the galloping, the elocutionary should be discouraged. . . .[95]

Hooper discloses the need for sensitiveness to rhythm in oral presentation of poetry. He writes:

> In order to read poetry well, it is indeed necessary that the voice be sensitive to the rhythm of that poetry. . . .
> The need for oratory has decreased. The need for a sensitive interpretation of poetry through the voice, an interpretation in which meaning is disclosed by holding to the natural mood and rhythm of the poem, has not decreased. In fact, it is just beginning to be recognized.[96]

A sympathetic rendition is suggested by Thompson. She says:

> Most poems are better understood by being read aloud intelligently, in a low-pitched sympathetic voice, untouched by sing-song. They should be phrased as in music, according to the meaning, still preserving the rhythm and music of the lines.[97]
> . . . . . .
> . . .Would there were no such think as elocution as that word is commonly interpreted. It is fatal to any poem. A simple, sincere, and unaffected reading is the best tribute that can be paid to the poet's work.[98]

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95. The Literature Committee of the Association for Childhood Education, Sung Under the Silver Umbrella. New York: Macmillan, 1935. p. 12.

96. Hooper, op. cit., p. 37.

97. Blanche Jennings Thompson, Silver Pennies. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937. p. 7.

98. Ibid., p. 8.

Ramsey reveals many characteristics of oral reading at its best.

> To read poetry to children quietly, pleasantly and without fussy or sententious comment may require a certain courage on the part of the teacher, more especially if it "hasn't been done that way" in one's particular, pedagogical midst.--The sensitive reader knows what it means to have a wealth of poetic suggestion in one's own mind, to have the magic of poetry suddenly reveal itself, to feel the charm of deepening associations and she wants children to share in these beautiful imaginative experiences. . . .In this type of reading poetry sounds like poetry--that is, the verse pattern, the shape of the poem, so to speak, stand out clearly in the rhythmical utterance of the reader. Attention to fine detail distinguishes the appreciative oral reading of poetry, such as carrying over the end of one line to the next by means of a delicate intonation, keeping a subtle stress for the verbs, and blending the adjective into the noun. . . .[99]

According to Dalgliesh, dramatic reading is not desirable in poetry programs; stilted or formalized readings are to be avoided.

> In any poem we may use, rhythm is the thing to be kept constantly in mind, and in reading poetry rhythm must never be sacrificed to drama. We used to think that poetry must be read very dramatically and children in school and out of school "declaimed" poems, accompanying their recitations with impassioned gestures.[100]

Mackintosh thinks effective oral reading must be cultivated. She suggests:

> Oral reading is an art to be cultivated in terms of many experiences in which the reader is responsible for conveying the thought from the one book, which he holds in his hands, to the group as audience.[101]

The adult who wishes to instill in her listeners a love for poetry will need to be a good reader, Johnson and Scott declare,

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99. Ramsey, op. cit., p. 116.

100. Dalgliesh, op. cit., p. 45.

101. Mackintosh, op. cit., p. 183.

They say further:

> . . ."A good reader" is one who is able to read intelligently and sympathetically without losing the rhythm. Many a poem has meant little until an intelligent lover of poetry has read it well aloud. . . .
>
> To be a good interpreter of poetry how much knowledge of its technique should the teacher have? None is really necessary. . . .[102]

Curry and Clippinger find simplicity and sincerity important criteria in presenting poems orally. They say:

> . . .The teacher should read or, better, recite the poem in order to get the best results. There should be no effort at "elocution" in its worst sense, but a simple sincere rendering of the language of the poem. The more informal the process is, the better. . . .[103]

Gray gives the following suggestions to those who read poetry to children:

> . . .Make everybody feel at home in responding heartily to the rhythm. This does not mean the dread sing song fashion. Rhythm is a combination of the meter, the diction, and the living done in the poem. Each poem must be read in the kind of rhythm called for in the material.
>
> Avoid dull, dry drill. Don't insist on memorization. Don't dissect the specimen and leave the unlovely parts so that the defenseless student has no realization of the charming, integrated whole. Never allow an unnatural, artificial, affected reading tone, which a great many people seem to associate with poetry. Require the conversational, talking style demanded by the kind of beat and living and words used to describe the idea.[104]

The difficulty of reading poetry is revealed by Weekes:

> To read poetry well is more difficult than to read prose well. While the thought is being conveyed to the listner, the poetic quality, which is part of the literary quality, must be

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102. Johnson and Scott, op. cit., p. 748.

103. Curry and Clippinger, op. cit., p. 369.

104. Gray, op. cit., p. 151.

> preserved. The language of poetry often involves metaphor and decorative phrases that may obscure the thought. Devoid of meaning, the verse tends to lack interest and significance for the child. The meaning must, then, be discovered as well as the spirit of the writing, and, retaining the beauty of the verse form, it must be transmitted to the listener. It will not do to overlook the musical qualities and all other sound impressions of a word or phrase while intent upon the thought-content.[105]

Weekes thinks that a pleasing voice is essential to good reading. The voice should have a pleasing tonal quality, be flexible, and properly pitched. Good enunciation and proper pronunciation are necessary. She also notes the danger of poor reading:

> . . .Poor reading interferes with understanding and, therefore, interpretation, interest and pleasure. To read well is not reading "with expression." Too many teachers read "with expression" and fail entirely to convey the essence of the verse or prose to the listeners, the children. Reading "with expression" smacks of the superficial.[106]

Weekes gives the following suggestions to those who read aloud:

> To read so as to interpret indicates that kinship with the author has been established, that the spirit or vein in which he has written has been recognized, that there is insight into the purpose of his writing, that the emotional response of the reader reflects the emotional tone of the writing. To interpret what a writer has created is to express or convey to an audience, whom he cannot reach by word of mouth, that which he desires to say and which he has embodied in his writing. To read well, then, demands exploration beyond the printed word, a searching to find the true message of the creator. It means that one must seek out the part that each word and phrase and sentence plays in relation to the spirit and idea intrinsic in the whole. . . . To read well demands that the teacher understand what she reads, interpret what she reads, respond emotionally in the right way to what she reads. "Expression" will then take care of itself.[107]

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105. Blanche E. Weekes, Literature and the Child. New York: Silver, Burdett and Company, 1935. p. 276.

106. Ibid., p. 273.

107. Ibid., pp. 273-274.

The Time To Present Poetry

Among the authorities in the field of children's literature there is much debatable opinion on the suitable time to present poetry. Many think a setting should be created by building up a background for the poems to be presented. Others believe the teacher should await some special event when the poems to be introduced may be made more significant by the event. There are those who think moods, backgrounds, and special events are important to effective poetry presentation. They realize, however, that all poetry cannot be kept for such an event; to do so would mean that many poems suitable for children would not be heard by them. These specialists maintain that all poems do not need background.

Certainly, poetry can be made more significant by some particular event; therefore the teacher should anticipate and be prepared for many such events. The teacher should, also, be prepared to present many poems effectively on planned occasions.

Arbuthnot condemns the past practice that gave the last few minutes to the literature period. She thinks poetry should climax an experience.

> In schools the approach to poetry has been a bit more formal. Teachers have often thought they must "wait for the literature period at 11:40" and, sometimes, alas, there was no literature period; so poetry just waited and waited. Yet it seems fairly obvious that the time for a robin poem, as Dora V. Smith suggests, is at the particular and precise moment in spring when the children announce that they have seen their first robin. . . .In short, if you know quantities of poems, they may be used informally to climax any pleasant experience.[108]

108. Arbuthnot, op. cit., p. 172.

In introducing poetry, Weekes thinks the teacher should do so as the result of some normal happening in the classroom.

> . . .She should introduce a poem informally, letting the introduction come naturally from some actual, normal situation, as would be the case in any informal, social situation. . . .[109]

Huber thinks the enjoyment of poetry may take place as the result of timeliness in offering a poem. She writes:

> Because of the delicacy of the thing called appreciation, it can be so easily spoiled. The teacher or parent who wants to preserve for children the beauty and enjoyment that lie in poetry is alert to the effect of timeliness in offering a poem. Circumstances, interests, conditions of various sorts, affect the reception children will accord a poem. If a teacher is familiar with a great deal of verse suitable for children, it is easy to bring out the poem that fits best at a particular time, often with as happy results as if she were a magician producing a white rabbit from a hat.[110]

According to Arbuthnot the success of a poem depends "in part upon the mood and the setting in which the poem is introduced."[111] This does not necessarily mean that all poems must await some unexpected event for presentation. Arbuthnot thinks an unexpected event may be made more significant by presenting the right poem at the right time, but ". . . it is also obvious that there are many predictable uses of poetry for which suitable verses can be collected."[112] She suggests collecting poems for the change of seasons, the weather, insects, flowers, birds; the sun, moon, and stars. Whenever possible, she proposes correlating poetry with units of work and with school subjects, but warns against the use of

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109. Blanche E. Weekes, Literature and the Child. New York: Silver, Burdett, 1935. p. 282.

110. Huber, op. cit., pp. 70-71.

111. Arbuthnot, op. cit., p. 168.

112. Ibid., p. 172.

doggerel verse just because the title fits in with the theme of the class work.[113] She adds:

> . . .In short, correlate school subjects with poetry when you can legitimately by using authentic poetry, and when you can't, use poetry for contrast and enjoy the change.[114]

Harrington asserts:

> . . .Poetry more than any other type of literature must have its perfect moment to be properly enjoyed. The child's mood should always be taken into account.[115]
>
> . . . . . .
>
> To be appreciated and enjoyed poetry should be linked with every experience of the child--celebrations of various kinds, journeys to the zoo or distant places, or nature rambling. A sight, or even a picture, of ducks dabbling in the water will be the time for Kenneth Grahame's delightful poem "The Duck's Ditty" and will bring a chuckle of amusement.[116]

Shaw relates:

> . . .I wanted to introduce these first poems, or others, if more suitable, at appropriate times when the situation itself would give a clear image of the author's idea without the necessity of destroying the beauty of the lines through explanation. Until a background was built up, the poems were introduced in this way: "The Goldfish" by Dorothy Aldis and the "Little Turtle" by Vachel Lindsey helped in celebrating the event of re-stocking our aquarium. . .[117]

Rita Hogan finds the best time to present poetry is just after an experience. She relates such an experience: "'Snow' by Dorothy Aldis was read to a class after coming in from play on a snowy day."[118]

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113. Ibid., pp. 172-173.

114. Ibid., p. 173.

115. Harrington, op. cit., p. 57, 58.

116. Ibid., p. 58.

117. Debbie Shaw, "Do Children Love Poetry," American Childhood, 16:20, May, 1931.

118. Rita Hogan, "Enjoying Poetry with Seven Year Olds," Childhood Education, 14:164, December, 1937.

Tuttle, too, thinks the time to present poetry is just after an experience. As a supervisor, she witnessed an enthusiastic reception of Vachel Lindsay's "The Little Turtle," which was introduced after a trip into the woods where the children saw a turtle.[119]

Time for presenting poetry is described by Ramsey as follows:

> . . .If listening to good poetry is a part of daily experience, if the teacher is discerning in choosing the right moment for new impressions, a lasting love of poetry is established.[120]

In working with children for whom poetry has been spoiled, Ramsey suggests surprises and an approach similar to the following one:

> . . .With a group of children who flatly refuse to listen to poetry so unpleasant were their past associations with it, a wise teacher made no effort to force it upon them. She made the classroom experiences interesting for them in other ways, and helped with the one thing that claimed attention, the making of a city. One afternoon she read quite casually Rachel Field's "Skyscraper" from Pointed People. Eyes turned to the visions of the city's tall towers which could be seen from windows of the classroom. One youngster nodded and remarked "That's like them." The children talked a little about the familiar sight and noted details hitherto unobserved, and in the conversation the teacher caught the words, "Shiver," "tops against the sky," and "lie right down." The teacher followed up her advantage with other selections from Rachel Field's book of verse _____. For them "poem" had become a word full of charm and delight. We may begin wherever children happen to be, but we should sympathetically and intelligently help them to develop in their own way a taste for finer things _____. Literary adventures of this type go to show how sensitive children may become in their appreciation of poetic image and

119. Florence Piper Tuttle, "The Child and His Poetry," American Childhood, 22:14, June, 1937.

120. Ramsey, op. cit., p. 116.

> mood, and how direct and simple are the approaches which bring about the unconscious cultivation of taste in poetry.[121]

Anderson believes that poetry should be correlated with other subjects. She asserts, "There must obviously be no dragging of poetry by its very ears into a time or place where it has no possible meaning or application."[122]

Before beginning a program of poetry appreciation, Hooper thinks it necessary to familiarize one's self with the child's background and attempt to discover the individual child's attitude toward poetry. He adds:

> The need for knowing where to begin the guidance of appreciation does not demand a program of questions and answers. It is, rather, the impetus to a period of careful observation. She notes the general reaction to the first poem that she presents. She is quick to see what use, if any, is being made of the library table. She observes individual attitudes toward types of activity. All of this diagnosis should be made without apparent effort.
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> . . .The first poem that a teacher shares with her new group of children is a very important one. It is a kind of climax to their period of getting acquainted. If the teacher has been careful in leading the way, this new meeting place will be discovered without apparent effort.[123]

It is not likely that a perfect setting will occur in the average classroom for every poem that a teacher may wish or find desirable to present to a class. Often it may be fitting and desirable to have a poetry period and present poems just for the fun of it--just for the joy to be had.

McKee thinks that such matters as dates and sources have nothing to do with feeling the experience; instead they tend to

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121. Ibid., p. 118.

122. Anderson, op. cit., p. 7.

123. Hooper, op. cit., p. 46.

hamper its realization. He says:

> . . .So far as the writer can see such facts as the date of the author's birth, the number of wives he had, and the scholastic interpretations of his writings are entirely irrelevant to experiencing his poems or other writings.[124]

He explains:

> This does not mean, however, that backgrounds should not be constructed preliminary to the reading or hearing of a literary selection. In fact, such backgrounds are often necessary to a realization of what the story or poem tells, but there are backgrounds and backgrounds.[125]

McKee points out the following characteristics of the best type of background.

> Surely the right sort of background must give the child those experiences essential to the gathering of meaning from the poem or story. Such a background must necessarily be concrete and possess vivid reality. . . .[126]

He suggests that backgrounds of the following nature be avoided:

> . . .first, the background that really is not needed simply because the pupils already possess the concrete experiences with which to gather experience from the selection to be read; and second, the background that persists in giving either concrete details concerning matters irrelevant to what the selection has to tell, or that, by abstractions, general descriptions, and vague explanations, seeks to supply the concepts and feelings necessary to an experiencing of what is read.[127]

The establishment of a mood is thought important by Thompson.

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124. Paul McKee, Reading and Literature in the Elementary School. Boston: Houghton, 1934. p. 518.

125. Ibid., p. 519.

126. Ibid.,

127. Ibid.

> The quickest way to kill any possible interest in a poem is to say, "Today we are going to learn a poem named 'Barter' by Sara Teasdale. You may all sit up straight in your seats and listen." Rather, establish a mood by music, a picture, a story, another poem perhaps, or sometimes just skillful questions leading up to the thought in the poem to be read. . . .[128]

In introducing poetry to a class, Hooper suggests bringing in appropriate poems in connection with a unit of work or a particular theme being stressed.[129] Poems presented outside the natural setting should have a background provided.

He says:

> The teacher may create in prose a situation similar to that in the poem. She brings in such experiences as she may feel are necessary to relate the poem to the children's background, and she helps provide a mood commensurate with that of the poem. By doing this, she not only clarifies the objective phases of the poem, she also helps the child to appreciate the superiority of poetry over prose in exciting the imagination.[130]

Hughes Mearns contends that not all poems need to have a background provided by the teacher.

> . . .We discovered, too, that some poems are spoiled by a single extraneous word while others demand considerable explanation or setting in advance. Often we needed to tell first everything that was in the poem, so that our minds could then rest more comfortable upon the art of the poem.[131]

Weekes, too, maintains that all poetry does not need to be introduced by question, backgrounds, or a discussion.

> . . .Reading with no discussion is often very desirable; indeed, some poetry can be hurt by discussion of any sort.

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128. Thompson, op. cit., p. IX.

129. Hooper, op. cit., pp. 47-48.

130. Ibid., p. 61.

131. Hughes Mearns, Creative Power. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1929. p. 5[illegible].

> . . .Then there are poems which either do not need or do not warrant discussion. . . .[132]

Explaining Difficulties

Much poetry, suitable for children, contains difficult words and obscure ideas. From this situation arises the question, "How much explaining does a poem need?"; therefore writers in the field disagree as to whether baffling words or foreign phrases should be explained.

Some authorities think only words which are essential to the meaning should be defined. Others think the child should be able to get the meaning from the context or from the reading of the poem as a whole.

The authorities do not agree on the problem of explaining obscure ideas. Here, too, some think it necessary to clear up obscurities before the reading of the poem; others think the child, in most cases, can get the meaning after hearing the complete poem. Many think complete understanding of every poem is not necessary. Lowe advises explaining no more than is necessary.

> . . .First is to help the child to realize words and phrases foreign to his ordinary way of talking. The second is to take for granted that he can follow the poetic trail before him. If on his return he wants to talk about his adventures, well and good. But do not insist on his telling you in prose what he has met with. The initiative must be with the child. . . .[133]

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132. Weekes, op. cit., p. 296.

133. Orton Lowe, "What to Emphasize in the New Poetry for a More Popular Appeal to Children." The Elementary English Review, 6:38, February, 1929.

Ramsey thinks the child can get the meaning satisfactorily by hearing the poem as a whole. She asserts:

> There is no possible excuse for dismembering poems by taking single words or phrases from the context of the selection and introducing prosaic definitions which destroy the meaning of the poem. The query comes, "But the children ask what the words mean. Isn't it necessary to answer their question?". . . To the plea that "children do not understand," the answer is, give them first a fair chance to see poems and stories as wholes. . . .[134]

Hooper, too, contends that the child need not understand every word in order to get the meaning.

> . . .He may not, and need not, comprehend every word in a poem, in order to find meaning in it. However, he does need guidance in the recognition of more abstract ideas, and encouragement toward finding pleasure in these abstract ideas.[135]

Arbuthnot finds explaining difficult words aids in an understanding and enjoyment of poetry. She says:

> Grown-ups must be aware, then, that the unusual words of poetry may be one source of obscurity and discouragement to certain children. They will like poetry better if they are surer of the meanings. They need not know the meaning of every word--some they can deduce from the context; some are too unimportant to bother about. Key words, however, should be cleared up before reading the poem, while other meanings may be developed casually after reading. Indeed, savoring the full flavor of the unusual word in poetry is part of the pleasure it gives. This must be done casually with genuine enjoyment and no niggling idea of checking up. It can result in an astonishing enrichment of vocabulary and a livelier feeling for words.[136]

She adds:

> Sometimes it is not words alone that obscure meaning but the subtle intention of the author in his use of those words.

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134. Ramsey, op. cit., pp. 116-117.

135. Hooper, op. cit., p. 71.

136. Arbuthnot, op. cit., p. 170.

> Mood or characterization often needs to be anticipated. You do this by paraphrasing the poem in advance, informally, with silent apologies to the poet. With such help, children not only do not miss the point, but they can anticipate it with added pleasure. . . .[137]

Eaton finds that poems simple enough for children to understand perfectly are less valuable than a great poem partially understood.

> . . .It is by no means necessary that every line in a poem be clearly understood.[138]
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> . . . . . .
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> . . .It is a grave mistake to provide children with only such poetry as they can easily understand. A great poem half comprehended is of more value to a child than many simple poems perfectly within his grasp.[139]

Curry and Clippinger find complete understanding unnecessary for the first reading, as understanding comes from repeated readings. They declare:

> It is not necessary that children should understand everything in a poem. If it is worth while they will get enough of its meaning to justify its use and they will gradually see more and more in it as time passes.[140]

Wheeler thinks the emotional appeal in poetry takes care of the lack of understanding.

> . . .They do not need to fully comprehend the meaning, for all good poetry carries an emotional as well as an intellectual appeal, and this rarely fails to reach a child. . .[141]

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137. Ibid.

138. Eaton, op. cit., p. 126.

139. Ibid., p. 127.

140. Curry and Clippinger, op. cit., p. 370.

141. Jean Wheeler, op. cit., p. 211.

Harrington, too, thinks the emotional appeal will make up for the lack of understanding. According to her way of thinking, poetry that fits a child's experience should not be barred from use because of difficult words. She writes:

> . . .It is a mistaken idea that everything in a poem should be understood for perfect enjoyment and appreciation. Children will see or feel enough to get the meaning, and will gradually see more as time passes. Difficult words should not bar a poem that possesses beauty of sound and creates a mood which the child recognizes and enjoys. A child understands far more than grownups give him credit for. Many words are understood by the ear that are not recognized by sight. . . .[142]

The Time and Place for Questions and Discussion

Asking and answering questions has, for a long time, been a part of the school program. Teachers could visualize little or no learning unless they received correct answers to the questions they asked. The most praiseworthy pupils were those who gave evidence of having acquired the most facts or having stored up the most information.

Here it is necessary to point out that the purpose of the teaching poetry is not to learn facts or store information but to give pleasure. Questioning children tend to have a testing effect; generally speaking, pleasure does not result from such a program. This is not to say that no questions should be asked. If there is a desire on the part of the children to ask questions or to discuss any part of the poem, they should have the opportunity to do so.

142. Harrington, op. cit., p. 58.

There is no place, though, for the teacher's quizzing and testing program. McKee reveals this fact very plainly when he says:

> . . .There should be no questioning or quizzing of the children by the teacher concerning what has been read. Neither should she seize the opportunity to talk or lecture on information concerning the selection, but a normal discussion may take place whenever the children are moved to the point of self-expression. They should be encouraged to make comments on the selection, to tell about the things that caught their interests, and to ask questions, but all this is merely a sharing of experiences gathered from the story or poem. There must be no forced comments, no probing, no quizzing, and insistence upon verbal reactions. Merely give the children a chance to tell what they wish to tell. If they have no comments or questions to make on a given selection, there is no reason why the matter cannot be left as it is. We must get away from the idea that no learning can go on unless the teachers are asking questions and the children are answering them.[143]

According to Roller, how one feels about a poem is a personal matter and should be discussed only when one so desires.

> . . .But the reason for liking the selection should never be stressed. Very few children know why they like a certain poem, and there is no reason why they should. The insistence on such explanations is as absurd as forcing a student to tell why he likes chocolate pie or apples.[144]

If there is a desire on the part of the child to discuss a poem, Hooper believes the opportunity should be given him.

> Having read the poem (or said it if she finds remembering poetry easy) she should leave it to work its own magic. Whatever active response the children make should not be directed. If conversation comes spontaneously, it should be cultivated. If they wish to express themselves by drawing, molding, or writing, it should be encouraged.[145]

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143. McKee, op. cit., p. 520.

144. Roller, op. cit., p. 199.

145. Hooper, op. cit., p. 48-49.

Hooper thinks that the teacher need not be discouraged if silence is the only response she receives. He suggests that sometimes silence is more expressive than action.[146]

Arbuthnot gives the following reasons for not asking for children's questions or comments.

> When you finish reading a poem, wait for the children's questions or comments. Don't ask, "children, did you like that poem?" because the poor lambs, earnestly trying to please the teacher, will chorus docilely, Yes! Or if you don't have the group really with you, this question will invariably bring forth a strong-lunged "No!" that will set you back for a week. Instead of embarrassing children with such interrogations, wait for them to speak or to ask a question or to make an honest if hesitant comment that is really their own. If nothing comes, read on and don't worry.[147]

Weekes finds that many poems are best enjoyed with no discussion.

> . . .Reading with no discussion is often very desirable; indeed, some poetry can be hurt by discussion of any sort. Mystical beauty which can only be sensed, poetry which arouses one's deepest feelings and emotions which one hardly cares to express in words, or for which one cannot find words to express himself adequately, tend to be food for thought rather than a subject of discussion. Then there are poems which either do not need or do not warrant discussion. . . .[148]

Weekes advises a flexible program--one in which the child has the opportunity for discussion and the asking of questions if he so desires. In this program the teacher should do no more than guide his thinking. She relates:

> The natural outcome of contact with the new and interesting is to comment or to question. It is the observer who makes the comment or who raises the question in the out-of-school

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146. Ibid., p. 49.

147. Arbuthnot, op. cit., p. 171.

148. Blanche E. Weekes, Literature and the Child, New York: Silver, Burdett, 1935, p. 296.

situation. In all too many cases it is the teacher who does the commenting and the asking of questions; to do so is almost common practice in all but the new type classroom. If learning is to go on, the child must be active. If he has something to say and gets no chance to say it, it tends to be dissatisfying. Often the teacher's questions, which are prone to be planned in advance, are not his questions, and, perhaps, do not touch on his interests.[149]

Reading of Poetry by Children

In general, poetry should be read to small children, but there may be many occasions when they would like to read it for themselves. The peculiar form and unusual phrases of poetry discourage extensive reading of such form by young children. Because of these difficulties and because many children in the primary grades have not learned to read well, some authorities think primary children should never attempt to read poetry; others find it advantageous to let the children read for themselves.

It is only in our time that poetry has been written especially for children on the child's level and from the child's point of view. Weekes states:

> The poetry being written for the child today is written about things and events which are of interest to him--the things and events about which he thinks and talks, whether they be the people and events of his own little world of reality or the people and events of the world of make believe or fairy-land. The result is a wide range of poetry, written in language well within his capacity to understand. . . .[150]

149. Ibid., p. 299.

150. Blanche E. Weekes, Literature and the Child, New York: Silver, Burdett, 1935. p. 177.

Because of the difficulties encountered, Staats thinks children are not capable of reading poetry satisfactorily even for themselves.

> . . .The reading of poetry by the children themselves is a very different matter. The animation seems lost. In fact, children's librarians say that the lovely poetry books are rarely ever chosen. The poetry pages often inserted in readers are usually trying, both for the learner and the teacher. It is always annoying to have one's sense of rhythm rudely interrupted every other line by difficult and unusual words or expressions. Poetry to be enjoyed must swing along without interruption. . . .[151]

Weekes, too, points out the difficulties encountered by children in reading poetry. She warns of the disastrous effects that may result. She says:

> . . .When attention must be focussed on word recognition and other mechanics of reading, it is diverted from what should be the center of interest--the fine content and the fine form. . . . . There may follow a disinclination to read the more difficult material. It is also possible that a dislike for reading stories and poems as a leisure or recreatory occupation or pleasure may result. The reading of poetry is especially difficult for unskilled readers. It has reading difficulties not often found in prose. . . .[152]

Dalgliesh reveals the undesirable manner in which poetry at one time was read by children.

> . . .We used to think that poetry must be read very dramatically and children in school and out of school "declaimed" poems, accompanying their recitations with impassioned gestures.[153]

Arbuthnot claims:

> Poetry should never be used as a reading exercise. For this reason some basic readers for the elementary school omit poetry from their contents altogether. When children have to

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151. Pauline Staats, "A Vocabulary Study of First Grade Poetry," Childhood Education, 9:127, December, 1932.

152. Blanche E. Weekes, Literature and the Child. New York: Silver, Burdett, 1935, pp. 265-266.

153. Dalgliesh, op. cit., p. 45.

struggle with a poem as a reading lesson, they are baffled and discouraged.[154]

Weekes states:

> When children voluntarily express a wish to share a poem with the members of the group there is a guidance to be given by the teacher, guidance in relation to the reading of the poem, so that when it is presented to the audience its beauty will be intact. During the presentation there must be no stumbling over, nor fumbling for, words or thought. What is read must be read understandingly, with ease and with proper interpretation. . . .[155]

Weekes thinks a period set aside especially for the reading of poetry by the children has distinct values.

> . . .To assign a special period to the reading of verse tends to enhance the importance of poetry as far as the children are concerned, and, thereby, contributes to the development of a more favorable attitude toward poetry reading. Another value lies in the stimulation to browse about, and to make personal choice of poetry to read to the group. Such reading, in turn, demands careful study to find the meaning so that interpretation may be sound, as well as careful preparation for the presentation of the poem to the audience. A third value lies in the wider contact with poetry which the many and varied choices provide; wider because so many children of elementary school age with their limited reading skill will be unable to indulge in extensive reading of poetry, fraught as it tends to be with reading difficulties.[156]

The following suggestions for children who read to a group are given by Roller:

> . . .With the aid of the teacher, the children should develop the best way of reading. Without the reiterative correction, a skillful teacher can make them see that a reader must watch punctuation marks, must feel the "flow" of the verse, and, if he desires success, must refrain from using absurd tones and gestures of the elocutionist. He must read

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154. Arbuthnot, op. cit., p. 166.

155. Blanche E. Weekes, Literature and the Child. New York: Silver, Burdett, 1935, 2911.

156. Ibid., p. 293.

with the natural voice, somewhat subdued, and attempt to interpret the poem by his own restrained emotions.[157]

When children are familiar with a large number of poems, Ramsey thinks the reading difficulties, to some extent, are cleared up.

> . . . . Children to whom the sound of poetry is familiar welcome with zest encounters with it on the printed page. The store of remembered rhythms in one's mind helps tremendously in the more complex process of getting one's poetry directly from the printed page. Moreover, there is a new kind of pleasure for the young reader in the discovery that he can read his favorite poem for himself.[158]

McKee finds a need for the reading of poetry by children.

> . . .In addition there are times when poems can be read silently, as during the free--reading activity or in silent reading by the class. In all these . . . activities the essential purpose is the enjoyment of poetry through reading it and hearing it read.[159]

Memorization

Learning poetry just to accomplish a task of memorization should have no place in the school curriculum. As has been pointed out in the first part of this chapter, required memorization has been responsible, to a great extent, in creating a dislike for poetry.

Memorization does have value and should have a place in the poetry program. Verses, tiny parts, and whole poems can come to one's rescue in a time of need to aid in an expression of joy,

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157. Roller, op. cit., p. 199.

158. Ramsey, op. cit., p. 117-118.

159. McKee, op. cit., p. 548.

excitement, or distress. A store of remembered rhythms may aid in an escape from a world of reality, and the expression of ideas and feelings may be made more significant by the use of poetry. It is McKee's opinion that

> . . .every attempt should be made to secure considerable memorization of poetry, even among kindergarten and first-grade children, but at the same time such memorization must never be forced or assigned. In fact, there is no good reason for insisting that a given child shall memorize a poem. If it has become real, vivid, and delightful to him as an experience, he will choose to memorize it as part of himself, just as he chooses to learn a melody of song which he can whistle, hum, or sing as he goes about his business. The point is that the teacher must make a poem so real and pleasant to the child that he wants to memorize it. Such a poem will be full of experience for him. In this one at least he can see the pictures and hear the sounds. He likes it and wants to be able to say it over and over again.[160]

McKee disapproves of assigned poems to be memorized. The child should be allowed to choose the poems he memorizes.

> Obviously this proposition requires attention to individual differences. Nothing could be more futile than to assign the memorization of a given poem to all the pupils of a class. Rather each child should be encouraged to memorize those poems from which he gets the most enjoyable and most real experiences. Under such conditions there is some hope of creating love for poetry.[161]

According to McKee, children should be given the opportunity to present memorized poems in real situations.

> Always children who so desire should be given plenty of opportunity to present memorized poems in real situations, such as room or assembly programs. Here the child has the wholesome motive of sharing his discovery with other children.[162]

160. McKee, op. cit., p. 521-522.

161. Ibid., p. 522.

162. Ibid., p. 522.

Conditions under which memorization of much poetry may result are pointed out by Weekes. She says:

> Significant motivation, which is to say, having a personal need or interest which an activity meets or satisfies, is a strong stimulus to effort. What others do, and do well, is also conducive to effort, as children are prone, for one reason or another, to imitate or emulate what others do with satisfying results. The teacher's ability to say poetry well may also prove highly stimulating. The total situation in which the child finds himself, which is largely under the teacher's control, should provide the stimulation to memorize. Sometimes the responsibility for the assembly programs would warrant the suggestion that other boys and girls might like to hear some of "our" poetry. However, no one can predict the exact nature of the stimulation which will set children voluntarily to memorizing. It is an out growth of the environment--the total classroom situation and often of the home as well. The teacher must be ever alert to normal, natural stimulating factors. Once the habit of memorizing some part of a poem has been established, if the right atmosphere pervades the room, if the right attitude has been developed, memorization will be quite a matter of course. . . .[163]

Shaw finds that the teacher's habit of repeating poems from memory often inspires other children to memorize poetry.

> . . .I usually told my poems from memory especially after the first few readings. Occasionally I remarked that this poem was a very easy one to say without the book, but I never stressed memorization. In this story period individual pupils had opportunity to call for any story or poem that they wanted to hear. Very often a member of the group would volunteer in answer to these requests. This practice naturally led to a desire on the part of the children to know stories and poems well enough to be able to recite them to the group.[164]

Present practice in the most progressive schools is revealed by Weekes.

> . . .The practice today is to let the child decide what he will memorize--or if he will memorize any of that which he has been reading or discussing. It is quite voluntary on his part,

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163. Weekes, op. cit., pp. 303-304.

164. Shaw, op. cit., p. 20.

> and what he memorizes is his own choice, usually what appeals to him most, be it merely a part or the whole. That he will fix much in memory is safely assumed, if, from his earliest school years he has found pleasure in listening to poetry, or in saying it over and over, alone or with the group.[165]

Thompson, too, maintains that children should be allowed to choose the poems they memorize. She says, "Children in a class should not all learn the same poem, nor yet poems which have no appeal for them."[166]

Dalgliesh warns against forced memorization.

> Poetry is often taught by teachers who do not enjoy it, and it is memorized by children who have no desire to memorize it. Memorizing a poem because one enjoys it and wishes to do so is valuable; memorizing it as a task is not only without value but has a decidedly negative effect.[167]

Roller disapproves of forced memorization. He asserts that memorization will result voluntarily from the right atmosphere.

> . . .In the elementary school, there should be but little necessity for memorizing poetry. If the child likes a poem a great deal, and lives with it normally, without the obvious and often false insistence of pedagogy, he will learn the parts that, in his present moment, are appealing. It is truly amazing how much poetry an imaginative child will acquire, if he is placed in an environment where the stimuli are healthy and tactful.
>
> Although a child should never be forced to memorize a poem, he should be encouraged to do it for himself. That is, he should realize the value of making his own a poem he loves. Teachers must ever strive to make excellent things appear as excellent things and this is certainly one.[168]

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165. Weekes, op. cit., p. 303.

166. Thompson, op. cit., p. VIII.

167. Dalgliesh, op. cit., p. 43.

168. Roller, op. cit., p. 199.

Summary

Criterion of Current Practice

A survey of the literature of the period, 1928-1948, discloses among children a distinct dislike for poetry, which was ascribed to many undesirable practices found in the public schools. The following practices were given as the reason for the apparent dislike.

1. Children have been required to memorize poetry for disciplinary purpose.

2. The selections required for memorization were often too advanced for the learner to understand or appreciate.

3. An analysis and interpretation of poetry have been employed.

4. Monotonous reciting of poems for display purposes was prevalent.

5. The approach to literature as information to be remembered was noted.

6. The common notion that literature appreciation was acquired by an understanding and liking for such matters as excellent style, construction imagery, and the choice of vocabulary resulted in selections which contained splendid examples of these items.

7. In many instances, selections were made on the basis of the teachers' own interest.

8. Oftentimes there was little exposure to poetry other than the meager samples found in the school readers.

9. The general idea that the purpose of teaching poetry was to improve manners or morals resulted in selections that pointed to these issues.

Criteria for Selections

The survey also suggested means by which children may be brought to enjoy and appreciate poetry. It was pointed out that this interest may be developed through the type of criteria set up for making selections and the choice of methods used in presenting poetry.

According to the literature, selections made on the following bases may bring about the desired results:

1. All selections should not be made by adults; children, themselves, should have a part in the selections.

2. Selections must not be confined to few well known poems; the whole world of poetry should be made available to children.

3. Individual differences must be taken into account.

4. The emotional and social maturity of children should be considered.

5. The poems presented must be excellent literature and suitable for children.

6. Poetry presented should embody experiences more in harmony with the child's probable experiences and should be expressed in language within his comprehension.

7. Children's interest was considered important in making selections.

8. The following elements were pointed out as having an appeal for children:

a. Strongly emphasized rhythm is especially pleasing to young children.

b. Rhyme is attractive to them.

c. Assonance is as attractive as rhyme.

d. Action is important.

e. Characters should be familiar to child life--as, toys, pets, and children; subject matter, too, should be familiar.

f. The poem must ring true.

g. It must have tone sincerity.

h. Simplicity has its own appeal; this does not mean, however, that children should be given trivial verse.

i. Refrains and all sorts of repetition give children a thrill.

j. The music should be very prominent.

k. Poems which tell a story have great appeal.

l. Humor must be of the hilarious and fairly obvious sort.

m. The diction must be distinguished with words that are rich in sensory and associative meaning.

n. The subject matter of the poem should invest the strange or the every-day experiences of life with new importance.

9. Great poetry for children must deal principally with children's experiences.

10. It was strongly advocated that the teacher "run the gamut of all children's experiences and moods, and enrich childhood with all the varying pleasures and delights which poetry can induce."

Methods

In order to bring about an enjoyment and appreciation of poetry, the survey revealed a need for methods that more nearly approximate the educational philosophy of today--that is, the growth of the whole child.

Characteristics of superior methods as disclosed in the literature are as follows:

1. The attitude of both the teacher and pupil should be purely a recreatory attitude; thus the difference between the teaching of poetry and the work type silent reading is comparable to that which should exist between the development of enjoyment of music and competent instruction in the fundamentals of arithmetic.

2. The poetry period should not be approached with plans for dissecting, testing, or grading; there should be no assignments, questions and answers.

3. Techniques that help children to respond to the rhythms of poetry and which make them sensitive to its emotional appeal and its imagery were advocated.

4. A method tends to be good if the child desires to repeat the experience.

5. A good method is distinguished by:

   a. Readiness--which suggests a state of anticipation.

   b. Activity--which suggests mental activity.

   c. Satisfaction results from a pleasant experience.

6. Whatever method is used must be adapted to individual use.

The Teacher's Relation to Effective Poetry Presentation

Evidence in the literature pointed to the teacher as the guiding force in effective poetry presentation. Pleasure and appreciation derived from any method of presenting poetry may, therefore, be conditioned by the teacher's appreciation, her interest in, and knowledge of, children's literature, her philosophy of education, her knowledge of child psychology, and her background of experience. The following abilities and traits were recommended:

1. The teacher's own appreciation of, and interest in, poetry was probably the most notable trait mentioned.

2. The ability to make good selections from a thorough knowledge of children's literature was suggested.

3. A sympathetic understanding of children--their abilities, interests, needs, and desires was strongly advocated.

4. The ability to create a normal, happy atmosphere was pointed out.

5. A close contact with children was suggested.

6. The necessity of discovering the meaning as well as the spirit and beauty of the writing and transmitting these to the listener was pointed out.

Importance and Qualities of Good Oral Reading

According to valid evidence in the literature, the primary appeal of poetry is to the ear; therefore oral reading was suggested

as the most important means of presenting poetry. The great injury done to poetry as a result of stilted and formalized presentations were pointed out.

1. Oral reading of the best order should make the listener forget the reader, the words, and the surroundings; it should make one see the pictures, hear the sounds, and smell the odors described in the reading.

2. In order to read poetry well, it was suggested that the teacher practice reading orally all types of poems.

3. The authorities advise keeping within the mood of the poem.

4. The need for a sensitive interpretation in which the meaning is disclosed by holding to the natural mood and rhythm of the poem was stressed.

5. The use of elocution, as such, was discounted.

6. The conversational, talking style demanded by the kind of beat within the poem was thought desirable.

The Time to Present Poetry

The authorities in the field of children's literature do not agree as to the suitable time to present poetry. Some think that a setting should be created by building up a background; others believe the poem should be kept for some special event through which it may be made more significant by the event.

Suggestions as to the correct time to present poetry were given as follows:

1. As often as possible use a poem to climax a special

occasion or event through which the poem may be made more significant.

2. Let some poems be introduced informally--coming from some actual normal situation.

3. In poetry presentations, timeliness is important.

4. At times it may be necessary to create a mood or construct a background; construct backgrounds only when such are needed. Not all poems need backgrounds.

5. The teacher should anticipate and be ready for many obvious uses of poetry.

6. Correlate school subjects with poetry when it can legitimately be done.

7. When the perfect moment arrives, present the correct poem.

8. With children for whom poetry has been spoiled, the introduction should come informally with no mention of the word "poetry."

9. The presentation of poetry should come after a careful observation of the child's interests, background, and mental ability.

10. Poetry should be presented at many planned poetry periods.

Reading of Poetry by Children

The authorities do not agree on the problem of "children's reading of poetry." Because of the peculiar form and unusual phrases, many think that children should not attempt to read poetry; others believe that children should be encouraged to read it for themselves. The general opposition to children reading poetry is pointed out as follows:

1. Difficult and unusual words or expressions slow the reading, consequently, interrupting the rhythm.

2. The attention focussed on the mechanics of reading divert the center of interest from the beautiful form and fine content.

3. Children are baffled and discouraged when struggling with a difficult poem as a reading lesson.

Many reasons were given for permitting children to read poetry for themselves.

1. There is a wide range of poetry written in language well within the child's capacity to read and understand.

2. Many children express a desire to read and share a poem.

3. There is a value to be realized when children are allowed to browse about and make personal choices.

4. Growth takes place from the preparation made in getting ready for an audience presentation.

5. Free reading provides employment during free periods.

Explaining Difficulties

The authorities do not agree on the problem of explaining difficulties; some think it necessary to clear up obscurities before the reading of a poem, while others think the child, in most cases, can get the meaning after hearing the complete poem. Many think only words which are essential to the meaning should be defined; others think the child should be able to get the meaning from the context or from the reading of the poem as a whole. There are those who think complete understanding of every poem unnecessary. Some advise:

1. Help the child understand words and phrases foreign to his ordinary way of talking.

2. Give them first a fair chance to see poems and stories as wholes.

3. The child need not comprehend every word in a poem; however, he does need guidance in the recognition of more abstract ideas.

4. Unusual words of poetry may be one source of obscurity and discouragement to certain children; therefore key words should be cleared up before the reading, while other meanings may be developed casually after the reading.

5. The emotional appeal in poetry oftentimes takes care of the lack of understanding.

Time and Place for Questions and Discussion

According to the literature, there is no place in the poetry program for the teacher's questions. The purpose here is not to learn facts or store information but to give pleasure. Asking questions tends to have a testing effect; ordinarily pleasure does not result from such a program. The authorities suggest:

1. There should be no questioning or quizzing of the children by the teacher.

2. There should be no lecture by the teacher concerning the selection.

3. There must be no probing or insistance upon verbal reactions.

4. Many authorities advise a flexible program--one in which the child has the opportunity for discussion and the asking of questions if he so desires. The teacher should do no more than guide his thinking.

5. It is to be observed that all poems do not warrant questions or discussion.

Memorization

Learning poetry just to accomplish a task of memorization is without value; instead it has a decidedly negative effect. A store of pleasantly remembered rhythms, verses, or bits of verses can enrich one's life greatly. Memorization still has a place in the poetry program but only under certain conditions. Worthwhile memorization may take place under the following conditions in the manner described:

1. Memorization must never be forced or assigned.

2. Every attempt should be made to secure considerable memorization of poetry that the child chooses.

3. Given opportunities to present memorized poems in real situations has a tendency to encourage memorization.

4. The teacher's ability to say poetry well may also be stimulating.

5. Voluntary memorization is an outgrowth of the environment--the teacher should be alert to normal stimulating factors.

CHAPTER IV

ACTIVITIES THAT MAY CREATE AN INTEREST IN POETRY

The intent in Chapter IV is to suggest activities that may create an interest in poetry. It was pointed out in Chapter III that oral reading was probably the most important and most effective means of presenting poetry to children. There are, however, many activities which may help to create an interest in this form of literature. The most outstanding means suggested in the literature were choral speaking, music with poetry, and dramatization of poetry.

Choral Speaking

General suggestions for using choral speaking are given by Weekes.

> Choral-speaking is what the term implies, the speaking, not the singing or the chanting of verse-speaking choir. If the right goal be set and if the teacher has the necessary techniques so that she is prepared to give the proper guidance, it would seem that verse-speaking might make some contribution by increasing interest in poetry, not all of which lends itself to such treatment, however. Poetry with a pronounced rhythm, with marked tonal contrasts or poetry with a refrain, or repetitive phrasing is especially well suited to beginners in the art.[1]

The value of choral speaking is pointed out by Arbuthnot when she asserts, "Teachers report that speaking poetry together makes it live for the children, does wonders for the improvement of their speech and voices, and gives them the keenest pleasure.[2]

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1. Blanche E. Weekes, Literature and the Child. New York: Silver, Burdett, 1935. pp. 311-312.

2. May Hill Arbuthnot, Children and Books. New York: Scott, Foresman, 1947. p. 179.

Further values in this method are stressed by Kangley.

> One of the most promising techniques for the development of an appreciation of poetry through active participation is choral reading.
>
> What does choral reading provide in the way of a deepening awareness of poetry as an art? Primarily it awakens children to the beauty of language. Words allied to music become magic things and the obligation to speak them beautifully, simply, effectively, creates a new reverence for them. Speech is the material of poetry, but too often it has taken on a commonplaceness from its everyday use. Verse speaking arouses in children a lively almost physical response to rhythm. Through working out speech patterns in poetry children become aware, as they would never become aware through formal instruction, of various types of rhythm, marching rhythms, dancing rhythms, skipping rhythms, and subtle modulations of rhythm within a poem.3

Music with Poetry

The possibilities of a rich interpretation of poetry through music are noted by McKee.

> The enjoyment of some poems is increased when they are sung. This is particularly true of nursery rhymes and ballads. In many schools this activity is cared for through a rich program in music, and is frequently administered by the music teacher rather than by the teacher of literature.
>
> At times the children are taught to sing a nursery rhyme or ballad after the poem has been considered as a piece of literature. The teaching of the song is entirely a matter of recreation and is handled with a corresponding technique. Occasionally, however, the poem to be sung may be a strange one. In such cases the procedure used in presenting it should be quite the same as that employed in introducing new poems to be read. Occasionally simple dramatizing of the action of a poem during the singing is fruitful of experience-getting.4

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3. Lucy Kangley, An Approach to Poetry Appreciation, Elementary English Review, 13:207, October, 1936.

4. Paul McKee, The Teaching of Reading. Boston: Houghton, 1948. pp. 581-582.

Dramatizing Poetry

Another approach to poetry appreciation is through dramatization. Conceivable values of such an approach are indicated by Hartman.

> Dramatizing poetry, too, is another revenue of approach. This gives the chance for creating within bounds; of repeating the poem and in that way of becoming familiar with it; of making the poet's spirit the child's own. Children who would accept poetry in no other way can undoubtedly be led gently into the love of it in this way. It is also making use of a natural impulse of the child to act things out.[5]

Puppet shows and pantomines provide ways of dramatizing poetry: these are emphasized by McKee.

> Likewise some of the literature taught should be dramatized. Usually such expression takes the form of puppet shows, pantomimes, and dramatic reading. Puppet shows may be used to dramatize nursery rhymes and fairy tales which the children have read. Pantomimes may well center around nursery rhymes, fairy tales, original experiences of the children, and stories.[6]

Creative Writing

The desire to create poetry may develop as an outgrowth of an atmosphere filled with poetry. Since there is a possibility that this condition may frequently occur, the remaining portion of this section will be devoted to methods of obtaining creative writing.

The core of modern philosophy is the development of the whole child; therefore, anything that may aid in this development is essential to the school program. For this reason, creative writing should have a place in the school curriculum.

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5. Juliet Hartman, "Place of Poetry in Children's Literature," Elementary English Review, 9:19, January, 1932.

6. Paul McKee, Reading and Literature in the Elementary School. Boston: Houghton, 1934. p. 524.

During the past two decades attention has been focused on creative writing. Although it has not been accorded the same prominence in every school, it has been emphasized in many. In some localities, for instance, the whole curriculum has been centered around creative writing, while in others, the idea was viewed cautiously or was ignored completely.

Concerning this problem, Weekes has this to say:

> Creative self-expression in the last few years has found its way into the schools, on the assumption that the process of creating that which is an expression of the individual's own ideas or emotions—or both—is essential to his complete development.....The schools of today—the progressive type—believing that art is for the many rather than for the few, regard the creative activities, or the process of expression through the fine and the constructive arts, equally as important as the acquisitive activities, or those which result in the development of skills and the accumulation of knowledges, together with this use.[7]

That many people may desire to express themselves creatively is pointed out by a newspaper editor when he says:

> .....A vigorous and intelligent people in a progressive state will want and need to express their thoughts and feelings in all branches of the arts.[8]

According to McKee:

> No program in literature can be complete without provision for creative production of verse and prose by children who possess the necessary equipment with which to do such work.....[9]

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7. Blanche E. Weekes, Literature and the Child. New York: Silver Burdett and Company, 1935. p. 360.

8. H. W. Kendall, "What Does North Carolina Want." Greensboro Daily News. Published by Greensboro Daily News Company: Greensboro, N. C., June 23, 1948.

9. Paul McKee, Reading and Literature in the Elementary School. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1934. pp. 523-524.

Values of Creative Writing

If creative writing is to maintain a place in the public schools of today, it must yield specific values for the child; it must have a part in the growth of the whole child. One should not expect to produce a class of poets but one could expect to produce an atmosphere of enthusiastic appreciation for this type of work.

Through creative writing there is a possibility of an increased appreciation for great poetry. Personal satisfaction may result from the expression of one's own ideas, consequently developing within the child a sense of importance and freedom. There is even a possibility that latent talent may be developed, and, of course, improvement in the child's language may result from the natural expression of ideas.

Authorities in the field of children's literature find many reasons for including creative writing in the school curriculum, as witness the following reasons given by McKee:

> Several purposes are proposed for creative writing. In the first place it seeks to give the child opportunity to express his own intimate thoughts and feelings concerning experiences with which he comes in contact. This self-expression of his personal and intimate reactions is supposed to contribute to the development of a well-balanced, happy, and well adjusted personality. Such purposes are obviously a rebellion against the old formal procedures which throttled the child's natural expression of his own ideas.
>
> A second purpose of creative writing lies in making provision for those children who possess literary talent to secure encouragement and appropriate instruction. This does not mean that the job of the elementary school is to provide training for the prospective literary genius. It merely indicates that the school must discover those pupils who possess marked literary talent and provide suitable encouragement and opportunity for development.
>
> A third purpose lies in the possibility of arousing and maintaining a sensitiveness to an interest in and an appreciation of good literature. There is some reason to think that the child who begins to write original material and is guided properly in the development of this talent also becomes

more conscious of high literary values. He learns to like to read good writings. He develops a prejudice against the cheap and shoddy thing. He becomes sensitive to the real qualities of literature and recognizes the artificial production. Of course the realization of this purpose depends entirely upon the quality of creative writing in which the child engages.

Finally, the stimulation of original writing in which the child learns to use his own language to express his own ideas is undoubtedly more conducive to the development of language ability than are traditional procedures.....The best hope for improvement in language lies in working with the child's natural expression of his own ideas.[10]

Regarding the values of creative expression, Weekes has this to say:

It is becoming more and more evident that expressing one's self creatively tends toward a greater emotional stability, lessening the chances of an emotional blocking by providing an emotional outlet, and so reduces emotional tension. Capacities and abilities, perhaps unknown, powers that are latent, or weakened by disuse, are set to functioning and thus comes the sense of release from strain and restraint.....[11]

Owen suggests:

.....Not every person is given to express himself in song, or the artistic or musical talent to express himself in color, line or harmony of sound, but each one has the gift of language, a beautiful language, and if we can teach our pupils to use it rightly for the expression of thought, we have placed a magic lamp within their hands.[12]

Many authorities agree that the purpose of including creative writing in the school curriculum is not to make poets but to aid in the growth of the child.

Hooper asserts:

The purpose of an elementary course in poetry is not to make poets. Whenever that aim is evident, there is apt to be

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10. Paul McKee, Language in the Elementary School. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1934. pp. 292-293.

11. Weekes, op. cit., p. 361.

12. Nell Owen, "Creative Writing in the Upper Grades," Elementary English Review, 10:12, January, 1933.

an open opportunity for challenging the practicality of the course. Few children will become poets, in the sense that they will write poetry, either as a diversion or as a profession. Many children, however, will find a need, even though it may be very slight in some cases, for the use of words in expressing themselves. If we can so construct our course that it leads to an honest discrimination among words, a sense of the values of words and their arrangement, and a realization that language is as alive as the moment in which it is used, we may feel that the time has been well spent. If we may add to this the possibility of a keener appreciation of poetry, both from the pleasure of the experience, and the recognition of the distance that separates great poetry from their equally sincere efforts, there is further justification for fostering children's creative writing.....[13]

Paschal states:

.....A course in creative writing, or expression, is not primarily concerned with preparing a student for a literary career. ...The goal toward which a creative expression teacher is continually striving is the development of a thinking brain on the part of the student.[14]

Stevens suggests:

The teacher is not interested in making poets, but she is interested in helping them to realize their own possibilities.[15]

Weekes points out:

..Through opportunity from the earliest school days to be creative, it is hoped that there will follow the development of interests because of the development of capacities and abilities in the less-than-gifted person, so that he may find more satisfying and more varied occupations for leisure time, or develop so strong an interest that it may eventuate into an avocation. These, however, are specific and rather immediate goals. The ultimate goal to which these lead is the goal of all educative experience. The ultimate outcome of creative self-expression is the growth of the whole child, coming through the

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13. John Hooper, Poetry in the New Curriculum. Brattleboro, Vermont: Stephen Daye Press, 1932. pp. 112-113.

14. Alma Paschal, "What is Creative Expression." Elementary English Review, 11:149, June, 1934.

15. Olive Stevens, "The Third Graders Write Poetry." Elementary English Review, 10:6, January, 1933.

development of his intellectuality and of his individuality. The goal is the harmonious development of the self through the reaching out toward the highest potentialities of the self, in an effort to achieve such potentialities. Because it can contribute to this end-result, self-expression is an essential in the educative process.[16]

Dangers of Overemphasis

Creative writing can play an important part in the development of the whole child, but it is doubtful if it should have first place in the school curriculum. Many think it has been overemphasized, and, as a result, it has lost some of its value.

There is great danger in an overemphasis of this phase of the school program, for true creativeness is destroyed under such conditions. Force and pressure, too, are dangerous to this type of program. Whenever force and pressure are exerted, creativeness will probably be destroyed.

Hooper says:

> There has been a noticeable tendency recently toward an overemphasis of this phase of the poetry course; that is, many schools, in an effort to break away from traditional formality, have gone to the other extreme of exerting an equal amount of pressure on "creative poetry." Collection after collection of "poems" are exhibited as tangible results of the year's work in poetry, but quantity is not a reliable criterion upon which to judge results.[17]

Hooper doubts the practical worth of encouraging children to write poetry. He points out:

> The danger of encouraging primary children to write poetry comes from letting this sense of restriction become fixed. The act of writing poetry places the child in a

16. Weekes, op. cit., p. 361.

17. Hooper, op. cit., p. 112.

self-conscious situation. The product is more apt to be imitative than creative. The child reverts to the poems he has heard and seen, rather than to the poetry he has spoken.[18]

Weekes points out other practices that are undesirable. She warns:

...To follow each reading of literature by attempts at creativity is wholly undesirable. Classes have been observed which are habituated to the school routine of either dramatizing the reading, or illustrating it by paintings in color, in black and white, or by cutting silhouettes. Another class invariably receives a verbal suggestion, "When you have free time, see if you can write a poem--or a story," whichever the case might be. It was part of the class routine. Such routinization is most unfortunate, for children tend to be working under prescription rather than from inspiration, the genesis of creation.....[19]

MeKee, too, finds that there are types of creative writing to be avoided. These are:

While creative writing appears to be spreading rather rapidly through the school, much of what is being done is in the opinion of the writer mere quackery. Consequently one must be on his guard against the superficial things, the make-believe, and the mere machinery of the program. One type of quack creative writing is that in which mere self-expression is sufficient.....

A second type of quack creative writing is that in which standards and guidance are not used.....

There is a third kind of pseudo-creative writing to guard against. As mentioned previously this is the copying type. Here the child is asked to write a story or poem of his own which tells the same idea or follows the same form of a story or poem being considered in the literature program...[20]

Stevens reports, as follows, on the use of coercion and force, which, she thinks, is an undesirable practice:

Some methods now used in trying to develop creative personality should be avoided. One of these is the

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18. Hooper, op. cit., p. 114.

19. Weekes, op. cit., p. 376.

20. Paul McKee, Language in the Elementary School. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1934. pp. 301-302.

dominating "Bouncing Bet" method. This type consists of the teacher who goes after the creative spirit with hammer and tongs. She pries into the private thoughts of the children, forcing their creative selves into the open. This frightens them and at the first opportunity they scuttle back into their shells. They never creep into the open again while "Bouncing Bet" is about. The other is the formal "Polly Precise" method. This is the type that tries to do creative writing through coercion. We know that the only way to obtain creative work is through patience and watchfulness.[21]

According to Mearns, assigned creative writing is not the best practice. He points out:

> . . .After reading an enthusiastic book on the creative side, or after hearing a modern school lecturer, some teachers go forth to their classes, rap for order, explain the idea, and then, with the best intentions, assign a lesson in "creative work." They are most disappointed when they do not get a roomful of results the next day. "Fraud" they are apt to cry, and give up forever.[22]

Conditions Under Which Creative Writing May Develop

There seems to be, as yet, no definite or prescribed method of developing creative writing successfully. Some conditions seem to be more favorable than others. McKee states:

> . . .Some teachers apparently achieve some success with certain techniques. Others are just as successful with other approaches. Consequently the stating of rules is dangerous and misleading.[23]

Establishment of an atmosphere conducive to creative writing is suggested by McKee.

> The heart of the procedure in creative writing in general is found in the establishment of an environment in the class-

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21. Stevens, op. cit., pp. 6-7.

22. Hughes Mearns, Creative Power, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1929. p. 38.

23. Paul McKee, Language in the Elementary School. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1934. p. 294.

> room which encourages and develops original writing by the child. From the point of view of some definitions of creative writing this environment involves the use of many concrete experiences and activities which provide opportunity and demand for the child to write his own ideas.[24]

A sympathetic environment encourages independent thinking. Weekes suggests:

> ...An atmosphere which draws out the child to express his reactions frankly must be established. There must be an air of honest freedom in which the pupil feels willing and encouraged to follow out desirable impulses. Coercion and trite criticism must be eliminated. Poor attempts at composing must be met by encouragement to do more writing. Copying of rhyme, phrases, ideas, and the like must be penalized, and superiority must always be rewarded. In general the environment must be sympathetic atmosphere will come chiefly through encouraging the child to be free in thinking independently and in expressing sincerely his own thoughts and emotions.[25]

Weekes thinks the creative process a gradual one and should be dealt with in like manner:

> But the urge to create must be a spontaneous impulse, coming from within. It is, in the beginning, evanescent, vague and illusive. Little by little it takes on meaning, and grows in strength, slowly with constant modification, until the child "sees" what he wants to do. It is, therefore, rather futile and absurd to say to a child, "Make a picture for the poem"; or "Make a poem for the picture"; or "Let us make a poem about spring or create a dance showing how the wind blows over the wheat field." The impulse to create tends not to be there, but if it is, no command will be necessary to set the child to creating, if he is allowed to do so.....[26]

To point out how indiscreet it is to hurry the creative urge, Mearns recounts an illustrative experience:

> ...I came here to see creative appreciation, and I think I should be permitted to see it!

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24. Ibid.

25. Weekes, op. cit., p. 295.

26. Weekes, op. cit., p. 362.

Do you expect me to turn it on and off like a faucet?[27]

Time is an important factor in the creative writing program. Mearns declares:

> The creative educationists have a different notion of the use of time, and they have a different notion of results, but give us our own time and we promise to more than match the old school in even its own conception of results.[28]

Freedom is equally important as time. In a report of his experiences, Mearns states:

> . . .This "free" school is almost wholly a creative education school: it has no curriculum, no "subjects of study," no textbooks, no recitation, a total absence, in short, of the usual machinery of lessons and assigned tasks.[29]

Hooper thinks the teacher can obtain the best results through stimulation. He says:

> . . .Some elementary children will write poems, but it will not be because they were taught to write them. For those few, the teacher's part is largely one of stimulation and encouragement, the value of which will be in proportion to the teacher's understanding of the situation.[30]

Patience and friendliness on the part of the teacher play an important role in creative writing. Mearns suggests:

> One must be patient, but eventually the childlike quality of the real thing gives courage to many silent ones who have in the past been benumbed into repression by the over-powering vogue of the impossible adult thing. The work that they see us admiring is, after all, their own language. That, indeed, is the main reason, in my opinion, why it works upon them so powerfully. Into their silent

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27. Hughes Mearns, Creative Power. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1929. p. 38.

28. Ibid., p. 39.

29. Ibid., pp. 39-40.

30. Hooper, op. cit., p. 113.

> hours it plays its spell, evoking similar secretly familiar music. The friendly welcome, which they know will greet anything of theirs, does the rest; and soon another gift joins the collection, to take its place for general admiration, and to work, in turn, its own powerful contagion.[31]

It is thought by many authorities in the field of children's literature that an early daily contact with fine poetic writings may aid in the development of the creative ability in children. Hooper makes the following statement:

> ...It is doubtful, however, if any time is well spent that produces only "The dog and the cat both sat on the mat." There is less danger of this from a class than has listened often and critically to good poetry.[32]

McKee advises the creation of an adequate reading environment as a means of developing creative writing.

> Much of the approach to original writing will lie in the creation of an adequate reading environment. Everything should be done to carry out the program in literature successfully. There should be much reading aloud by both the child and the teacher. If at all possible the material read should include stories and poems written by children. Pupils should be encouraged to bring in writings of their own to be read aloud. There must be no coercion here. One wants merely a reading environment which offers the opportunity for children to contribute original stories or poems to literature activities.[33]

McKee adds:

> The writing of poetry may begin in the Kindergarten and continue throughout the primary grades. The first step, of course, is to surround the young child with the oral reading of a great deal of suitable poetry.....[34]

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31. Mearns, op. cit., p. 43.

32. Hooper, op. cit., p. 121.

33. Paul McKee, Language in the Elementary School. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1934. p. 295.

34. Ibid., p. 303.

Stevens thinks, too, that the reading of much good poetry aids in the development of the creative ability.

> In order to begin to develop creative writers, the teacher first reads much good poetry and prose to the group. Children's taste must be trained so that they will know the difference between the good and bad in literature. Children have innate good taste, but it has often been ruined by the time they have reached school by crude or course environment.[35]

Jackson suggests:

> One of the first things is to help children tune their ears so that they will appreciate the unique and colorful expressions of others. Creativity begins within a child when he responds to ideas that are fresh and original and true. To bring about this recognition of the individual voice, I read aloud poetic bits.[36]

Gillett finds that self-expression may be encouraged by reading poems of all topics:

> Frequent quotations or reading by the teacher of poems which are suggested by topics in art, music, or science, as well as in literature, helps to keep children alert to the poetic expression of ideas. Posting of poems on the bulletin board is also helpful. Making the most of children's own fancies, such as, "The wind is boxing with the trees today," or "The woodpecker sounds like a wireless operator," by encouraging the child and giving him an opportunity to write a poem as the ideas are expressed is a sure means of encouraging self-expression. An occasional few minutes spent in discussing a question like "What does the wind remind you of as it whistles around the corner?" will bring out interesting metaphors which can be expanded into poems.[37]

Weekes, too, believes that the creative urge may be awakened by a continuous, daily contact with fine writings:

> ...But the teacher, by her control of the total situation in which the child finds himself each day, can help to awaken the creative urge. Continuous, daily contact with fine writings may be the genesis of such stimulation. The teacher

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35. Olive Stevens, op. cit., p. 7.

36. Doris C. Jackson, "Poetry Making with Children," Elementary English Review, 20:129, April, 1943.

37. Norma Gillett, op. cit., p. 153.

by encouragement, can strengthen the creative impulse. . . .[38]

Gillett confirms the idea of listening to much good poetry: "It is readily accepted that as a background for writing, the child must hear and read much good poetry."[39]

Weekes points again to the value of reading poetry to the children and adds that much of the success of such ventures depends on the teacher. She says:

> . . .A source of inspiration is much reading of poetry within the level of the child to relive imaginatively and emotionally, as well as many and varied experiences, and many and varied interests. Even in the traditional type school these things are possible. Much depends on the teacher who has it in her power to create stimulating conditions and to encourage originality and individuality. There are personal factors, also; the teacher must find pleasure in poetry, in fine verse content and fine verse form.[40]

Weekes suggests also the reading of poems created by other children. "The reading of stories and poetry created by other boys and girls can prove an incentive to try to create."[41]

Rhyme

Poetry, to many, is a series of rhyming verses. But in the field of creative writing, rhyme should be approached cautiously. Those experienced in the field find stress upon it harmful to creative ability. Kinsey declared that rhyme cramps creative style. She says: ". . . .

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38. Weekes, op. cit., p. 362.

39. Norma Gillett, "Some Poetry Writing Experiences in the Third Grade," Elementary English Review, 11:152, January, 1939.

40. Weekes, op. cit., p. 374.

41. Ibid., pp. 366-367.

Rhyme should be discouraged rather than stressed, as it seriously hampers free expression."[42]

Parkinson, too, thinks emphasis upon rhyming harmful to the creative expression of the child. She asserts:

> ...In creating rhymes the thought becomes focused upon finding rhyming words which may defeat our purpose: it hinders the expression of the child's thought and feeling.[43]

Jackson suggests reading many poems that do not rhyme in order to dispel the charm of the rhyming elements. She reports:

> On these occasions I read aloud material which has no rhyme because a child's ear often is so captured by the rhyming element that he misses the essential poetry. Then, too, when he tries to make poems of his own he is likely to forget his ideas and concentrate on the jingle.[44]

Hooper thinks rhyming too difficult for the primary child. He says:

> There is a paradox in the fact that the primary child enjoys the sound of rhyme, but finds rhyming difficult in his own creative efforts. To say that rhyme is completely unnatural to the speech of children is, perhaps, too broad a statement. It is still a debatable topic. But it is true that the primary child's limited vocabulary makes natural rhyming a small part of his poetry. What might have been poetry becomes only imitative verse or jingle when the child sacrifices the right word for one that is used simply to complete the rhyme. This sacrifice is unconsciously encouraged in those schools where rhyme is used as the mark of distinction between prose and poetry.[45]

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42. Dorothy Anne Kinsey, "Poetry Writing in the Grades," The Elementary English Review, 8:35, February, 1931.

43. Grace M. Parkinson, "Creative Expression Through Poetic Language," The Elementary English Review, 8:29, February, 1931.

44. Doris C. Jackson, "Poetry Making With Children," Elementary English Review, 20:129, April, 1943.

45. Hooper, op. cit., pp. 114-115.

The creative writing program in the elementary schools probably should, at no time, develop to a point where the child would feel the need of a knowledge of the more subtle elements of poetry. Only the most obvious elements, such as rhythm, musical rhyme, and simple time beat, will probably be noted by the elementary school child.

Weekes asserts:

> It is hardly to be expected that an elementary grade child will discover any but the most obvious elements that contribute to pleasing verse. Alliteration, assonance, and other subtly effective uses of language are not for him; but simple time beat, rhythm, musical rhyme are well within his ability to comprehend and to use.....[46]

Self-approval of one's own work is not always evident. In many instances it must be cultivated. The child must be assured that this new creation is not out of order.

Mearns reports:

> Most of us would admit, in addition, that having uncovered a bit of the genuine creative stuff one must begin the cultivating of a liking for it in the child who brought it forth. Strange as it may seem to the uninitiated, it is not often a thing the children themselves would prefer at first among the many offerings of their mind or hand.
>
> Outside approval is here most important. You, their friend, like it and show them that you like it.[47]

All work should receive any favorable comment that may be justly given. Any work showing evidence of real creativity should receive special comment.

Mearns says:

> My invariable answer is that I so manage the controls that the highest approval goes solely to that work which bears the

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46. Weekes, op. cit., pp. 368-369.

47. Mearns, op. cit., p. 34.

mark of original invention. To be sure, one must perform this office so adroitly as never to be suspected of controlling at all. No matter how crude the product, judged by the usual standards of adult perfection, the work with the individual touch is given the place of distinction; and there it is kept for all to see. Not that other contributors are neglected or made needlessly to feel their lack; there are many easy devices for the encouragement of those who have not yet found their native tones. Experience with the better brings, not contempt, as the proverb foolishly avers, but affection; and a real knowledge of the good will always drive out a taste for the inferior.[48]

Mearns says further:

The presumption is that the teacher shall know what is the best work of a group. Unless she does, much is lost. One may have "creative work" and present the results for the world to see; it will remain as a definite and interesting infantile stage unless genuine creative education has a place in the classroom.[49]

Mearns finds that the best work is often ignored. He concludes:

Wherever I go I see splendid work of children ignored, even in the most progressive of modern schools. The pattern copiers too often win the larger approvals; the crude attempts at individual expression are passed by.[50]

Treut and others say:

...The original idea, the fresh invention, or the vivid, individual way of saying a thing is singled out for glowing comment because we know the things approved determine the direction of growth.[51]

It is agreed by the authorities that bits of real creativeness should receive the highest approval, but they suggest that the finished product is not the goal.

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48. Ibid., p. 41.

49. Ibid., p. 48.

50. Ibid.,

51. Treut and others, They All Want to Write, New York: The Bobbs-Merriel Company, 1939, pp. 3-4.

It was pointed out earlier in this chapter that the purpose served in placing creative writing in the elementary schools is not to make poets but to give pleasure and add to the child's total experience, consequently aiding in the growth of the whole child. It is, then, through producing creative writing that these goals may be attained and not through the finished product. Therefore, the teacher should concentrate her greatest efforts upon producing creative writing.

Weekes' observations serve to substantiate these findings. She states:

> It is the producing rather than the product which should be of greater concern to the teacher. At the same time it should be pointed out that children must be encouraged to produce the best products they are capable of producing. The result may be mediocre; in most instances it will be that or less than that, but whatever it be it should represent the child's best effort. Otherwise the educative value is lessened, not particularly in relation to the art which he is trying to create, but in relation to the individuality which is being wrought out through all his educative efforts, including his attempts at creativity.....[52]

In conclusion, Weekes calls further attention to the futility of trying to make poets. She points out:

> A study of the collected verse of boys and girls of junior and high school levels reveals that the number of writers are relatively few; that names of authors repeat themselves again and again. The thought, therefore, suggests itself that many who, at the elementary school level attempted creative writing have ceased being creative.[53]

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52. Weekes, op. cit., p. 377.

53. Ibid., p. 375.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

In Chapter I, the statement of the problem, "The Teaching of Poetry in the Primary Grades, a Suggested Supplement to Language Arts in the Public Schools of North Carolina, Bulletin No. 249," was restated in the following questions.

1. What values can the teaching of poetry contribute?

2. How should poetry be selected in order to attain desirable objectives?

3. By what methods can these objectives best be reached?

4. What are the objectives that may create an interest in poetry?

The survey of the literature of the period, 1928-1948, justifies certain conclusions that answer, at least in part, the above questions.

1. According to evidence in the literature, the teaching of poetry can contribute definite values of real worth. For the child it may provide an escape from a world of reality; it may delight, console, soothe, stimulate or satisfy; it may provide an outlet for emotional feelings or satisfy rhythmically; it may be a means of recounting experience, expressing ideas and feelings.

2. There is still a distinct dislike for this medium of literature, which is, in part, caused by the manner of selecting and methods of presenting poetry to children.

3. Concrete evidence in the literature points to the fact that there must be a definite place in the school program for poetry as a

form of literature.

4. In order to bring about the desired results, poetry should be selected on the basis of emotional and social maturity, individual differences, children's interests, children's probable experiences, and elements that appeal to children.

5. All selections should not be made by adults; the children should have a part in making some selections.

6. Only appreciation methods should be employed - that is, those techniques that help children to respond to the rhythms of poetry and which make them sensitive to its emotional appeal and its imagery.

7. A method tends to be good if the child desires to repeat the experience.

8. Most of the authorities agree that the teacher is the guiding force in effective poetry presentation. Pleasure and appreciation derived from any method of presenting poetry may be conditioned by the teacher's appreciation, her interest in, and knowledge of children's literature, her philosophy of education, her knowledge of child psychology, and her background of experience.

9. Since the primary appeal of poetry is to the ear, oral reading was suggested as the most important means of presenting poetry. Oral reading of the best order should make the listener forget the reader, the words, and the surroundings; it should make one see the pictures, hear the sounds, and smell the odors described in the reading.

10. There was no agreement as to the suitable time to present poetry. Some authorities think that a setting should be created by building up a background; others believe the poem should be kept for some special event through which it may be made more significant. It was

concluded that the teacher must be alert to every possible occasion for presenting poetry; if the special event, through which a poem may be made more significant does not occur, the teacher may provide the background.

11. Because of its peculiar form and unusual phrases, many authorities think that children should not attempt to read poetry; others contend that much poetry today is being written on the child's level of ability to read and understand; therefore children should be encouraged to read for themselves.

12. There was no agreement on the subject of explaining obscurities and difficult words. Some writers think the child can get the meaning after hearing the complete poem. Others believe complete understanding of every poem unnecessary, but there are those who question such a procedure. Some advise explaining only those words or phrases which may aid in better understanding of the poem.

13. Most writers agree that there is no place in the poetry program for the teacher's questions and lectures. They advise a flexible program - one in which the child has the opportunity for discussion or asking questions.

14. Memorization still has a place in the poetry program, but it should never be forced or assigned, instead it should be on a voluntary basis. It was thought that gratifying results may take place in a stimulating environment.

Recommendations

In the light of the preceding conclusions the following recommendations are made to teachers in the primary grades.

1. The primary teacher should be alert to every opportunity to present poetry to her class.

2. She should have a wide acquaintance with poetry suitable for children.

3. The teacher should acquaint herself with appreciation methods.

4. Extreme care should be taken to help children enjoy and appreciate poetry.

5. The findings of this survey may be more meaningful if substantiated by experiments with children.

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